



CHURCH AND STATE

IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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The main activities of the organization are: advocacy, social research, public policy and public institutions monitoring.

The Center for Public Innovation was established in 2014. Starting with 2016, CPI has been gradually taking over the most important projects of the former Foundation for an Open Society in Romania, in the field of open governance and human rights, such as: immigrants' integration, regaining Romanian citizenship, freedom of information and open education. The expertise of its members, who previously coordinated these programs at the Foundation for an Open Society, ensured a successful transition.

Currently, the Center for Public Innovation focuses on three major directions: open governance, inclusive society, and democracy and representation. Our recent research contribution includes the publication of the following reports: Regaining Romanian citizenship, Progresses and limits of the new political parties law, How to register a party.

The Soros Foundation-Moldova is a non-governmental, non-profit and non-political organization which was established in 1992 by the financier and philanthropist George Soros to promote the development of an open society in Moldova by developing and implementing a range of programs and activities that address specific areas of needs including media, legal reform, human rights, good governance and public health.

The Justice and Human Rights Department of Soros Foundation-Moldova's vision of rule of law is to build on the solid grounds of a fair, accessible and predictable justice delivery system, which effectively safeguards fundamental human rights.

One of the Justice and Human Rights Department's priorities is to reduce arbitrary limitations to human rights. Given the unfinished transition process, human rights are still at risk of being subjected to arbitrary limitations. This particularly refers to invoking the use of religious freedom in order to limit other fundamental rights.

The opinions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Soros Foundation-Moldova.

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1

Introduction

The present study contains an analysis of the data gathered in a complex research project, initiated by the Soros Foundation-Moldova and carried out from August to October 2016. The research employed a mixed methods design, having both a quantitative dimension (national survey representative at a national level) and a qualitative one (in-depth interviews and focus groups). The data were collected by the CBS-AXA Company; while an international team of researchers - Ovidiu Voicu, Jennifer Cash and Victoria Cojocariu - developed the research instruments (interview and focus groups guides and questionnaires). The aforementioned research team was also in charge of the data analysis. All the opinions and views expressed in this report belong to the research team and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Soros Foundation-Moldova or of CBS-AXA.

The main goal of this research was to analyze the Church – State relationship in the Republic of Moldova from a social point of view. To this end we measured the population's opinions and perceptions through surveys and focus groups, and opinion leaders and perceptions through in-depth individual interviews. The structure of the report is as follows: after we present the methodology, we discuss in a separate section each of the instruments employed during the research.

The first of these sections investigates the survey data and explores the conclusions that could be drawn from these. In order to offer a better understanding of the context, we analyzed religious behavior and proposed a religiosity taxonomy in the Republic of Moldova. Upon this we built an indicator reflecting the frequency of individual – church interactions and the types of religiosity. Regarding the context, we have also tried to identify the dominant values in Moldovan society, focusing on tolerance levels and on social conservatism and building the relevant indicators for them. These aspects allowed us to delve into the main research subject, *i.e.* the State – Church relation. From a legal standpoint there is a clear demarcation between Church and State; therefore, the main mechanisms of influence are in politics and public policies. Thus, we have analyzed to what extent some key public policies could bear the influence of religious elements and we have discussed the potential success of a religious – conservative agenda. The last part of the section discusses some transversal topics specific to the contemporary Republic of Moldova, such as migration, the geopolitical context and women's role in society.

The second section of the report analyzes the opinions and perceptions of several communities' opinion leaders, drawing from the data gathered in individual interviews. This part of the research took place in 8 localities. In each of these we conducted interviews with representatives of the local authorities (usually mayors), religious leaders for denominations with at least 50 adherents (usually the priests) and with school authorities (usually the principal), for a total of 33 interviews. Some of the topics discussed in these interviews touched upon issues such as: human rights, discrimination and intolerance, the Church-State relation, the religion-education connection, as well as possible international development models for Moldova. Religious freedom can sometimes conflict with other fundamental rights. Given this, we chose to analyze the perception of these rights, the potential conflicts between them, as well as existing solutions. The section is structured around each of the institutions tied with the three main categories of respondents: City Hall, School and Church. For each of these institutions, we present the main tendencies highlighted by our data. At the end of the section we present several similarities that have been identified among the three categories of opinion makers.

The third section analyzes the data gathered from the 8 focus groups we organized. Seven of these were organized with participants selected on the basis of their religious affiliation (3 groups of Orthodox Christians, 3 groups of mixed Christian religious minorities, 1 group of Muslims) and the eighth focus group was organized according to an age criterion (we selected young individuals, from 18-30 years old). The analysis follows a similar structure to that used for organizing the focus groups, analyzing together several focus groups according to the religious affiliation of the respondents that took part in them. The focus groups examined similar topics to the ones covered during the interviews with the opinion makers, presented in the second section. The focus groups also provided a good opportunity to address several topics which could not be fully covered in the survey.

The last section of the report is a brief synthesis of the conclusions that could be drawn from the three analyses made on each of the instruments employed. Thus, we intend to clarify things in light of the main objective of the research: ascertaining the Church-State relation in a social context. The first subject analyzed consists of the problem of human rights and their defense or limitation in a social context marked by conservatism and intolerance. We focus especially on religious freedom, one of the recurrent themes in the previous sections and one of the main topics of interest for the research. Then, we discuss the two sides of the State-Church relation: Church versus State (and their competition to be the source of legitimate authority), respectively Church and State (and the struggle of the churches to increase their influence and obtain more privileges in Moldovan society). We show towards the end of the section that, at least for the moment, the citizens draw a line in regard to how the Church exerts its influence in society – namely, they do not agree with the Church becoming directly involved in politics.

2

Methodology

The report analyzes the data collected in a complex research project, which contained both a quantitative component (survey) and a qualitative one (semi-structured interviews and focus groups). The data for both components were collected by the CBS-AXA Company. The data analysis and interpretation were provided by the research team (Ovidiu Voicu, Jennifer Cash and Victoria Cojocariu). The CBS-AXA Company has neither been involved in the data analysis nor does it uphold the views of the authors of this report.

The Quantitative Component

- **Scope of study:** the current population in the Republic of Moldova aged 15 and above, with the exception of the region from the east of the Nistru River;
- **Sample size:** 2090 interviews;
- **Data collection timeframe:** 8th of August – 21st of September 2016;
- **Interviewing technique:** computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI);
- **Sampling strategy:**
 - The research employed a stratified multi-stage probability sampling technique;
 - The stratification was based on the distribution of the population aged 15 and above of the Republic of Moldova in territorial units, according to the data provided by the National

Bureau of Statistics (which were last updated on the 1st of January 2016).

- Stratification criteria: 13 geographical units (based on the former counties), place of residence, locality size (2 types of urban localities and 3 types of rural localities);
- The selection of localities and subjects was probabilistic;
- The addresses of the interviewees were determined through the random route sampling technique;
- There were 183 localities studied, including Chişinău and Bălţi. There also were 432 sampling points, with a limit of interviews per sampling point of 5.

- The standardized questionnaire was designed by the research team (in Romanian) and updated based on the pilot study conducted by the company. A Russian version of the questionnaire was provided by CBS-AXA. All the respondents were presented with the option of being interviewed in the language of their choice. The questionnaire was multi-thematic and included the following subjects:
 - Religiosity and religious practice, religiosity and involvement in religious activities;
 - Perceptions and attitudes towards minority groups, including religious minorities;

- Perceptions of leaders and institutions, including religious leaders and institutions;
- Perceptions and attitudes towards human rights, including their potential clash with religious beliefs;
- Values held by the respondents.

The Qualitative Component

The qualitative dimension of the research consisted of 33 semi-structured in-depth interviews and 8 focus groups. In total, 103 individuals were interviewed (with special attention to opinion makers, church adherents, representatives of different religious denominations in the Republic of Moldova). The research team prepared the interview guides and the focus groups' questions.

In-depth Interviews

These were conducted with opinion leaders in 8 localities (5 rural localities and 3 districts' centers from 3 districts). The localities were selected in the first stage of the sampling process for the quantitative component presented above. The stratification criteria used were: geographical region and locality size, with some consideration to balance the locations according to their levels of ethnic and religious di-

versity. Each locality differs from the others by at least one of these criteria.

Three categories of respondents were identified in each of the 8 localities:

- “City hall”: the mayor, the deputy mayor or the general secretary in this order, depending on their availability;
- “Church”: the representatives of all denominations with at least 50 adherents. Usually, the representative was the priest. If the priest was not available, other representatives were selected, such as the vicar;
- “School”: the representative of the high school geographically closest to the school. If the locality did not have a high school, the local primary school was selected. The representatives selected for the interviews were usually the Principals, and, if not available, the Deputy Head Teacher.

Based on these aspects, in each locality there were carried out:

- **1 interview** with a representative of the City Hall;
- **1 or more interviews** with the representatives of the Church, depending on how many denominations were in the locality. In the bigger localities a minimum of **two interviews with representatives of minorities** were conducted.
- **1 interview** with a representative of the School.

33 interviews were conducted | [TABLE 1](#) |. The following table provides more details on these interviews:

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS

	Type of respondents	Number of interviews
1	Church	17
	1. Orthodox	7
	2. Other denominations	10
2	School	8
3	City Hall	8
	Total	33

The interviews were conducted in the period August-September 2016.

Focus Groups

This method was applied on the general population. The focus groups were carried out in Chişinău, with the exception of “2FG”, which was conducted in a rural area after several trials of organizing it in Chişinău have failed. The focus groups organized in Chişinău brought together individuals from several localities. The regional distribution criterion and the municipality criterion were taken into account.

The participants were selected through the snowball sampling technique, with the study subjects and field operators recruiting other individuals from their corresponding social networks. The selection process accounted for a previously established theoretical sample, which intended to recruit participants based on several criteria: religious affiliation, sex, age, and rural/urban residence. The participants had not previously participated in another focus group. The focus groups that united religious minorities were organized with the help of religious leaders and other church representatives. By gathering respondents from several localities we attempted to increase religious homogeneity and community heterogeneity. Furthermore, by mixing individuals

with little or no connection with one another we aimed at maximizing anonymity and thus we set the stage for a more open discussion among the participants. On the whole, Jehovah's Witnesses refused to participate in the focus groups.

We designed specific interview guides for each of the interviewed categories. The focus groups took place between September and October 2016. The following focus groups were conducted | [TABLE 2](#) |:

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

	Categories of respondents	Number of respondents	Date
1FG	Religious minorities from mainly Orthodox localities	12	17.09.2016
2FG	Religious minorities from localities with religious diversity	6	13.10.2016
3FG	Religious minorities (Chişinău and Bălţi municipalities)	9	18.09.2016
4FG	Orthodox from mainly Orthodox localities	9	18.09.2016
5FG	Orthodox from localities with religious diversity	9	24.09.2016
6FG	Orthodox (Chişinău and Bălţi municipalities)	8	24.09.2016
7FG	Muslims (women)*	3	09.10.2016
	Muslims (men)*	3	14.10.2016
8FG	Young people (18-30 years old) (all religious affiliations)	11	25.09.2016
	Total	70	

* Due to the special conditions encountered in the field, the focus groups from 7FG had a limited number of participants (each was conducted with 3 participants).

3

Citizens' Opinions and Perceptions

I. Introduction

One can analyze the relation between State and Church according to several dimensions. The conventional approach is institutional, but organizational and legislative analyses are also commonplace. In this report we study perceptions and public opinion, resorting to an analysis of the data collected in a survey applied to a nationally representative sample.

We consider that an approach based on people's points of view is both necessary and useful. The State and Church have something in common: both types of institution constantly interact with individuals. Beyond the bureaucratic apparatus, both of these institutions are legitimate insofar as people accept the precepts of a social contract or those associated with a certain faith. It is not surprising that the way churches influence state politics is often based on public opinion. The present analysis seeks to provide some means for decrypting the mechanisms of this process.

Survey data provide some key insights. We begin by describing several aspects pertaining to religious behavior and by putting forward a taxonomy of religiosity in the Republic of Moldova. This is an important element in defining the context of research. Starting from the identified religious practices, we build an indicator

that accounts for how frequently individuals interact with the Church and for the aforementioned taxonomy of religiosity.

A second section elaborates dominant values in society. Values are the assemblies of faiths and principles employed by people in morally evaluating the world. We are particularly interested in social conservatism and (in)tolerance. High levels of conservatism and intolerance are usually correlated with numerous instances of discriminatory acts; moreover, they could impact the elaboration and implementation of public policies by the State (if the thesis of Church influence holds).

A third section concerns the main topic of the research: the relation between State and Church. Although these two institutions are legally separated in the Republic of Moldova, there are some mechanisms through which the Church can exert its influence on the State. We will analyze whether and to what extent some key public policies have been influenced by the Church, and we will discuss the potential success of a Close-up spaces for "conservative-religious agenda".

The last section of the report analyzes some comprehensive themes which are endemic to the contemporary Republic of Moldova. The first of these is how high levels of emigration have influenced values. A high percentage of Moldova's po-

pulation lives abroad, a feature that might be expected to have left its mark on the values prevalent in the Moldovan society. The second topic is that of the geopolitical context. We mention the fact that the Republic of Moldova is a border country between two spheres of influence and we discuss the consequences of this situation. A third theme concerns how women are perceived in this country.

II. Beliefs and Religious Behaviors

Analyzing religiosity and religious behaviors per se is of secondary concern for this study. However, these could influence to a high degree the way citizens perceive the Church, the State and the relation between these two institutions. Accordingly, we have analyzed the responses to a series of questions regarding religion and religious practices to build a taxonomy of religiosity, as well as an indicator that measures the frequency and intensity of citizens' interactions with the Church. In the end we will analyze to what extent religious leaders can influence public opinion.

Self-reported Religious Affiliation

An important question of this survey concerned the religious affiliation of respondents. The importance of this question is inherent to the main research problem. Since this was a sensitive question, it is possible that the data might not accurately reflect the empirical reality, neither in the survey, nor in the official census. With this caveat in mind, we will now proceed to the presentation of the collected data. Most of the respondents (93%) identified as Christian Orthodox. 86% of these represented themselves as adherents of the Moldovan Metropolitan Church, while 7% were adherents of the Bessarabian Metropolitan Church. 2% of the respondents were adherents to Protestant or Neo-Protestant denominations; although sometimes there were noticeable differences between the number of adherents, we pooled these believers in a single category due to the small number of cases. Almost 1% of the respondents were atheists or agnostics, and less than 1% Catholics, Jews or Muslims. 3% of the respondents refused to declare a religious affiliation. We should underline that the responses are not an indicator regarding the religiosity of a person, but simply the formal adherence to a certain religious denomination. Throughout this chapter we will delve into the particularities of religiosity, focusing on the intensity of religious practices and other related aspects | TABLE 3 |.

Given these statistics, we will discuss the whole sample in the following analysis, noting from the outset that it is dominated by followers of the Orthodox Church. Accordingly, for the sake of simplicity we use “church” to refer to all organized religious groups and institutions. We mention when we come across perceptions or behaviors of specific denominations that are at odds with those of the sample taken as a whole. Taking into account the survey’s margin of error, the inferences regarding small groups (including the group of Protestants and Neo-Protestants) should be taken with a grain of salt.

Religiosity

The Importance of Believing in God

As in most other neighboring countries, believing in God is a defining characteristic of the Moldovan society: 94% of the persons asked responded affirmatively

to this question. Only 1% of the respondents denied the existence of God (the non-responses constitute the difference up to 100%) | CHART 1 |. Another relevant indicator is the importance they give to their relation with God. Most of the respondents argued that God is very important or important in their lives. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means “not at all important” and 10 “very important”, 79% of the participants chose values from the 8-10 range when asked how important was God in their lives. At the same time, the type of relation and even the conceptualization of God differed from believer to believer. How respondents conceive God does not necessarily overlap with

Church teachings. Thus, most of the respondents (51%) preferred the statement “there is a spirit or life force” to the classical teaching “there is a God that became incarnate” (37%). However, among the followers of the Bessarabian Metropolitan Church, 55% of the people agree with the latter statement. It is important to emphasize these particularities to show that faith in God is not always a reflection of religious dogma or tenets, irrespective of the respondents’ religious affiliation | CHART 2 |.

TABLE 3. SELF-REPORTED RELIGIOUS ADHERENCE

Self-reported religious adherence	Percentage
Orthodox – Moldovan Metropolitan Church	85,7%
Orthodox – Bessarabian Metropolitan Church	6,8%
Protestant or Neo-protestant	2,3%
Atheist, agnostics or no religious adherence	1,3%
Other reported religious adherence	0,7%
Unreported religious adherence	3,2%

CHART 1. HOW IMPORTANT IS GOD IN YOUR LIFE? [%]

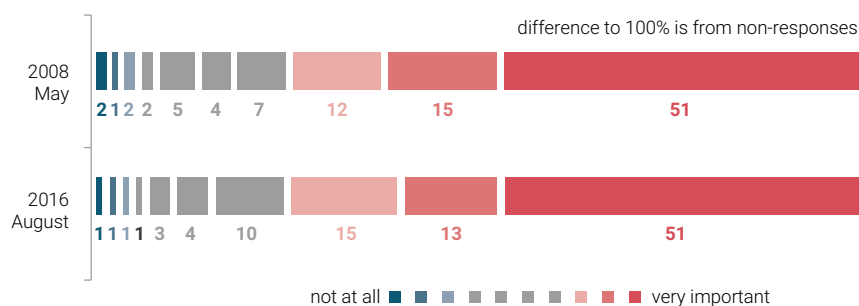
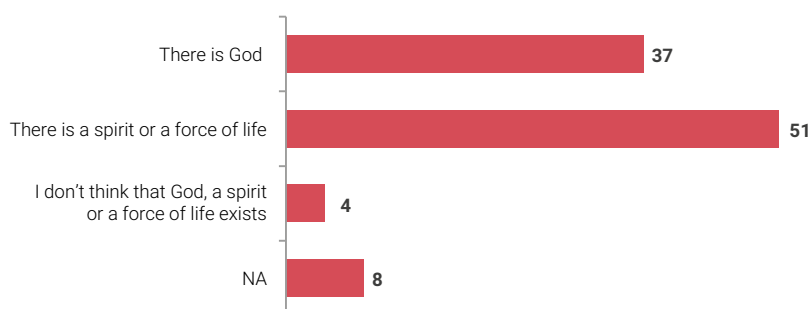


CHART 2. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS COMES CLOSEST TO YOUR VIEW? [%]



Religiosity can involve either a direct or a mediated relation with divinity. Usually, the mediated relation involves a religious organization. In order to discuss religiosity as a direct relation, a useful indicator is how often the person prays. In most religions, praying is the most frequent and direct way of addressing divinity. In our survey, over 90% of the respondents resort to praying: 45% do so daily, and 45% only under exceptional circumstances (for instance, when they are in trouble or encounter a certain problem that seems insurmountable without divine help). The percentage of those who pray frequently is much higher in the group of Protestants and Neo-Protestants (86%). Some explanations for this are that those denominations are organized more closely around the religious leaders and that most of the believers are converts (who actively sought belonging in a religious organization) | CHART 3 |.

Sometimes, churches might be unable to cater to their believers' religious needs. However, in Moldova 61% of the individuals consider that the church responds to their needs to a large (18%) or very large extent (43%). Only 27% think that churches respond to a little extent to their needs, while 8% consider that churches are only a little responding to their religious needs (8%). Once again, Protestants and Neo-Protestants consider significantly more that their religious needs are satisfied by the religious organizations (75%). Similarly to the data regarding praying, there are no statistically significant differences between the two groups of Christian Orthodox respondents | CHART 4 |.

Self-reported Religious Identification

In contrast to externalized behaviors, faith is an internalized aspect of religiosity. Someone's self-description as being religious represents an essential indicator in defining religiosity | CHART 5 |. 60% of the respondents said that they were faithful, whereas 38% said that they were not faithful persons. 2% claimed that they were atheists.¹ Besides simply recording

¹ As already mentioned, 1.3% of the respondents identified themselves as atheists or agnostics when asked about religious affiliation. Different responses may be given to the questions when a respondent distinguishes an "inherited" religious affiliation from his own religious practices. The question referring to someone's religious affiliation includes an important religious practice component. And this can determine different answers.

CHART 3. DO YOU PRAY? [%]

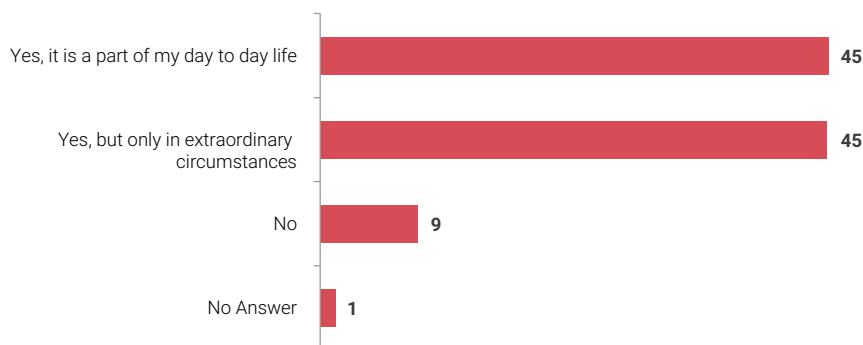


CHART 4. TO WHAT EXTENT DOES YOUR CHURCH RESPOND TO YOUR FAITH NEEDS ? [%]

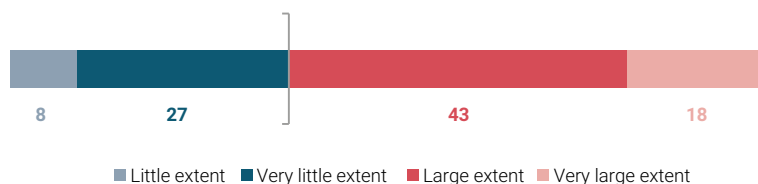
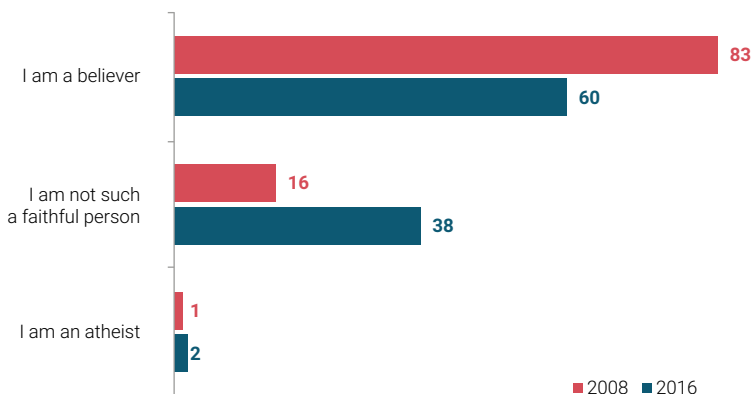


CHART 5. WHETHER OR NOT YOU ATTEND CHURCH, WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU ARE... [%]



these results, we have to mention the fact that the percentage of those who identify themselves as religious persons has decreased between 2008² and 2016, from 83% to 60%. It is not the objective of this analysis to explain this change, but it is useful to mention it nonetheless.

Types of Religiosity

We use three of the variables previously analyzed in order to build a typology of religiosity, based on the model of religious profiles that has been employed in the wider literature.³ We use the following variables:

- self-reported religiosity: whether the respondent declares that he/she is a religious person/believer (60% of the sample, according to the answers received at the question in the survey) or not;
- individual practices measured through the use of daily prayer; whether the respondent says that he/she prays frequently (45%) or not;
- church-mediated practices: frequency of attending church; whether the respondent attends the church at least 1 time/month (33%) or not (this indicator is presented in-depth later).

On the basis of these three variables, the following typology of religiosity results | **TABLE 4** |.

Elements of Religious Practice: Interactions with the Church

According to most respondents, religion is very important for them (32%) or important (50%). Much smaller are the percentages for those who consider religion to be of little importance (15%) or of very little importance (3%). These results are correlated with the ones obtained from the questions about how important God is for the respondent. Thus, we can assume that most respondents regard divinity

² We take for comparison the *European Values Study (EVS)* from 2008. This research employed a similar methodology for collecting data and a similar design. We will make several references to this study, which can be accessed at: <http://zacat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zacat.gesis.org/obj/fStudy/ZA4793>

³ Balakireva, O., Sereda, I., *Religion and Civil Society in Ukraine & Russia*, in de Hart, Joep, Dekker, Paul, Halman, Loek (Eds.) *Religion and Civil Society in Europe* (2013).

and religion as closely intertwined. However, such responses do not tell us about the direct relationship that respondents have with the church; this information is needed in order to get a better picture of the potential institutional influence that Churches exert. To this end we included in the questionnaire questions pertaining to the frequency of church attendance, the financial contributions given to the church; the adoption of some religious behaviors; the acceptance of Churches' influence in political and social life. The last aspect mentioned will be analyzed in depth in the subsequent sections.

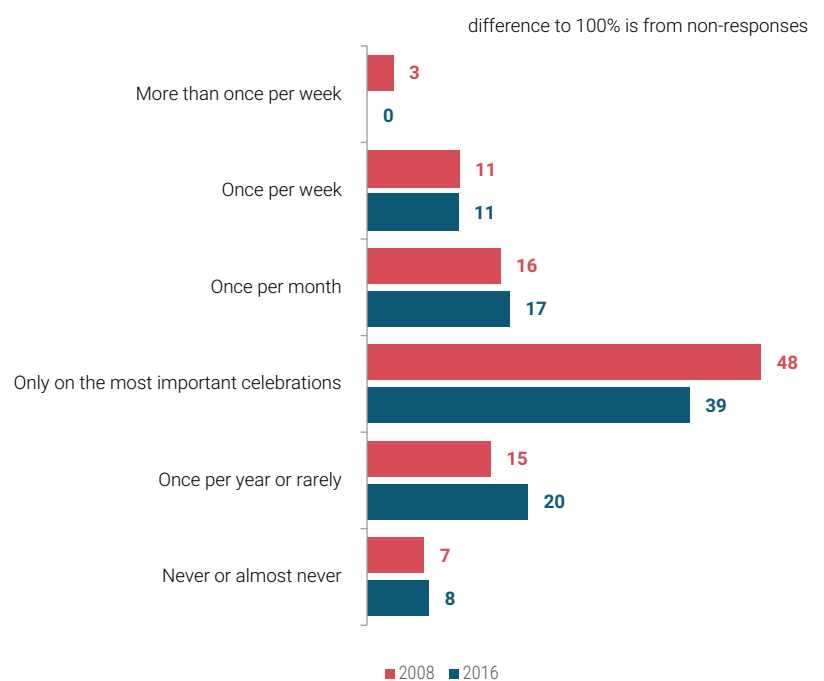
Frequency of Church Attendance

Attending religious services can often represent an opportunity for socialization rather than for spiritual uplifting. This is especially valid for some big events, such as weddings, funerals or baptisms, when the religious service is acquired because "this is how it must be". The classic indicator for determining the frequency of church attendance thus must exclude such events as in questions like: "With the exception of weddings, funerals and baptisms, how often have you attended church lately?" | **CHART 6** |.

TABLE 4. TYPES OF RELIGIOSITY

Religiosity	Description	Share of the population
Diffuse	Non-religious persons: they neither identify themselves as religious nor do they practice religious acts	27%
Declared	They identify themselves as religious, but lack regular practice.	24%
Individual	Frequent usage of prayers, but without frequent church attendance, or regular (individual/collective) practice without identification as religious persons	32%
Traditional	Self-identification as religious and regular practice (either collective or individual)	18%

CHART 6. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF WEDDINGS, FUNERALS AND BAPTISMS, HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU ATTENDED CHURCH LATELY? [%]



Only a low number of respondents (11%) attend church regularly (at least once per week). 17% attend church services approximately once per month, while most of them (39%) only go to church on important holy days. 20% reported that they go only once a year to church, while 8% never visit places of worship (that is, with the exception of weddings, baptisms or funerals). Comparing the situation with the data collected in the EVS, we noticed no statistically significant changes regarding church attendance (all the differences are within the added margins of errors for the two surveys).

The profile of the believer who does attend church regularly is the following: she is more likely to be a woman, to live in a rural area and to be older. Education and income have no statistically significant effect. Among the religious groups, Protestants and Neo-Protestants attend religious services more often than the adherents of the other denominations: at least 57% reported that they go to church at least once a week.

Pecuniary Contributions to the Church

Out of all the respondents, irrespective of the frequency with which they attend religious services, 30% stated that they usually contribute financially to the church they attend. This was yet another question that excluded events such as weddings, baptisms or funerals. 49% of the respondents said that they do not make donations to the church. The remaining 21% either did not answer the question or were not among those who attended church | CHART 7 |. Those who attend religious services more frequently tend to give money to the church (42% of those who frequent a place of worship weekly), but so do those who go very rarely to the church (41% of those who only go once a year). We can assume that the former are paying for the services

they consume⁴. Even those who do not attend church may respond to a social pressure to give something to the church. Among the confessional groups, the most predisposed to offer financial contributions to the church are those who belong to the Bessarabian Metropolitan Church (40%).

All of those who responded affirmatively to the question whether they gave money to the church were asked to estimate the sums they donate monthly. The average answer was 51 lei.⁵ The answers, however, range from 3 lei to 1.000 lei. However, the large sums, that surpass several hundreds lei, are given only by a small percentage of the respondents. The most frequent sums are 50, 20, 10, 30 and 100 lei. We can estimate that the regular contributions of those who interact moderately with the Church do not surpass 100 lei. This sum is given by individuals living in urban areas and with higher incomes, while the contributions are much smaller for those living in rural areas and with lower incomes. Once again, Protestants and Neo-Protestants donate on average more than the other groups.

CHART 7. PECUNIARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CHURCH [%]

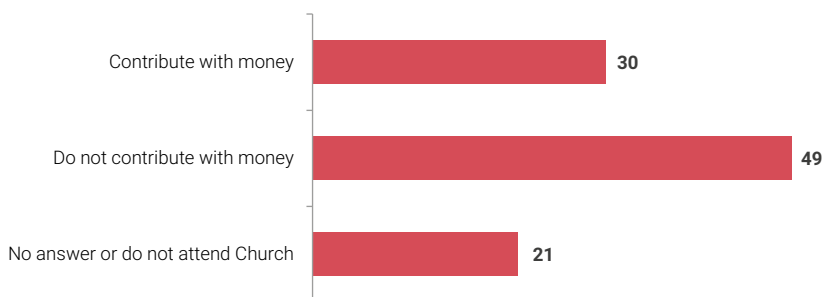
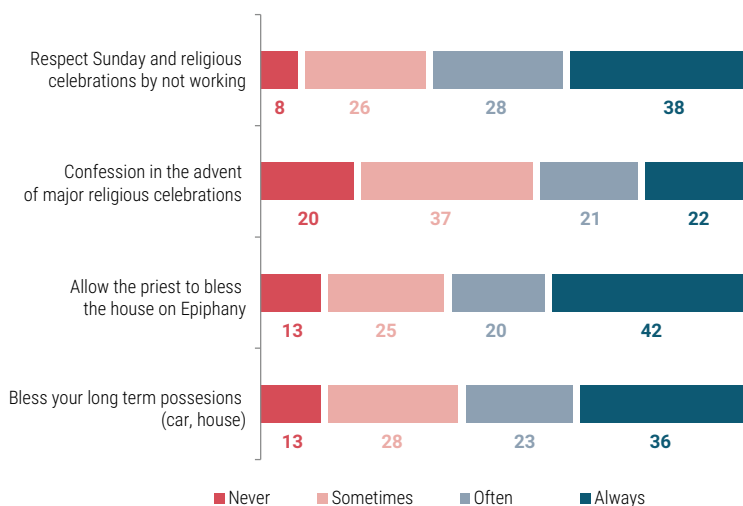


CHART 8. HOW OFTEN... [%]



Rituals and Rites

A third dimension of religious behavior consists of the way people relate to religious rites and rituals. These are not necessarily those that follow the tenets of the official church, but can be mixtures of religious precepts and folk traditions. Taking into account the structure of the population (according to the official data), we tried to see how the respondents related to several rituals of the Christian denominations | CHART 8 |:

- Not working on holy days (on Sundays, for instance) is a current practice respected by a majority of the respondents. 38% of them said that they never work on holy days, while 28% often do not work on feast days;
- Confession in the advent of major religious celebrations is a much less prevalent practice: only 22% of the respondents always confess their sins, 21% often do not work on feast days;

⁴ We did not distinguish between tithes, donations, purchases (of candles, etc.), or taxes for services (special prayers, weddings/funerals/baptisms).

⁵ In 2016, 1 Moldovan leu was equal to approximately .05 Euro or .05 USD. Average donations were thus in the range of 2.50 Euro/USD.

often do, 37% sometimes and 20% never participate in the sacrament of reconciliation. One factor contributing to these numbers is that the sacrament of reconciliation requires a period of fasting;

- The ritual of blessing the house on the eve of Epiphany is a common practice: 42% always welcome the priest for this ritual and 20% often welcome the priest for cleansing their homes with holy water;
- Blessing possessions such as a car or a house, although not a central tenet of Christian dogma, is a commonplace ritual. 87% of the respondents report doing this sometimes, and 36% always ask the priest to bless such possessions.

It is interesting to note that the most recurrent practices are those that do not necessarily require the believer's active participation. Furthermore, these practices also tend to be more public, such as a visit from the priest. Responses concerning ritual participation are positively correlated with the affirmative answers received to the question about pecuniary contributions to the church, which leads us to hypothesize that it is the money given at these rituals that respondents have conceptualized as "donations". The fact that many respondents abstain from work on holy days shows a certain level of personal organization. The sacrament of reconciliation requires the highest individual involvement, since it is based on fasting for a certain number of days and entails a discussion with the priest. Therefore, it is not surprising that this is the least widespread practice. Nonetheless, an impressive number of people continue to follow this practice.

A special form of ritual is the pilgrimage. Such a practice entails investing significant financial resources and is based on a desire to search for a spiritual purpose. 36% of respondents had been on at least one pilgrimage during their lives | CHART 9 |.

The holy places from their own country are the most visited (by a third of the respondents), followed by those in Romania (7%), Ukraine (6%) and other countries (9% - among these, Israel was one of the most visited countries). Fewer than 6% of the respondents had been on pilgrimages in two countries, 2% in three countries and 2% in four countries.

An Indicator for Measuring the Frequency of one's Interactions with the Church

We built an indicator to measure the frequency of one's interactions with the church, based on the answers we received to the questions presented above. We took into account the following types of interactions:

TABLE 5. FREQUENCY OF INTERACTIONS WITH THE CHURCH

Dimension	Percentage
Attends the church at least once a month (with the exception of weddings, funerals and baptisms)	33%
Donates money to the church (with the exception of weddings, funerals and baptisms)	30%
Practices at least one of the analyzed rituals (with the exception of pilgrimage)	52%

The indicator is built upon the intersection of the three dimensions presented above. It can take discrete values from 0 (it is outside all of these groups) to 3 (it is common to all groups). The higher the value of the indicator, the more often the respondent interacts with her church.

23% of the respondents rarely interact with the church (the indicator takes a value of 0), 42% sometimes interact with the church (indicator value = 1), 31% frequently (indicator value = 2) and only 4% have very frequent interactions with the church (indicator value = 3).

In the subsequent sections we will merge the categories of those who frequently and those who very frequently interact with religious organizations. Thus, if for an individual the indicator takes the value 2 or 3 we will say that she has frequently interacted with the church. This is the case for 35% of the respondents | CHART 10 |.

CHART 9. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ON A PILGRIMAGE...? [%]

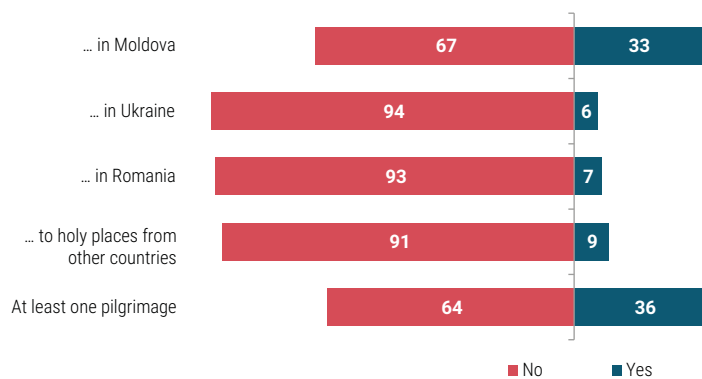
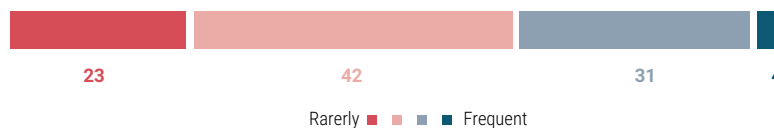


CHART 10. FREQUENCY OF ONE'S INTERACTIONS WITH THE CHURCH [%]



Perceptions of Religious Leaders

Religious leaders could represent important mechanisms of Church influence. Churches do not differ that much from other organizations from this standpoint. However, our survey tested the hypothesis that religious leaders are perceived as more reliable and trustworthy than political elites (see below), a trait which could make them more influential. Therefore, we tested the level of citizen trust in several religious leaders (belonging to all the main religions and denominations analyzed in this report).

The main observation is that most of the religious leaders are far from notorious. In most of the cases, at least 75% of the respondents said that they did not recognize the listed individual. The exception to this finding was Metropolitan Vladimir. A second observation was that negative opinions were the norm for individuals who were recognized. Thus, we could argue that the citizens of the Republic of Moldova do not trust the religious leaders.

The lack of notoriety of Church leaders and the low levels of citizen trust in them is at odds with the general favorable attitude towards the Churches (as shown by as shown by the previously analyzed empirical findings of this survey about trust in various institutions and by the previously analyzed empirical findings of this survey; for instance, most of the respondents agreed with the statement that Churches satisfied their spiritual needs to a high degree). We will return to this key finding later, when we discuss the relation between churches and the state.

The only bishop truly known at a national level is the leader of the main religious organization, the Metropolitan Vladimir: 75% were able to express their opinion about him and only 15% said that they were not aware of who he was. However, there is no consensus regarding how trustworthy he is: 41% have low and very low levels of trust in him, while 34% have high or very high levels of trust. The second representative of the same Church, the Bishop Marchel, is somewhat more notorious than other Church leaders: "only" 69% of the respondents were not aware of his identity. However, the share of negative perceptions (17%) surpassed the share of positive perceptions (9%) too. All the other religious leaders are even less known and in every case the negative opinions prevail | CHART 11 |.

CHART 11. HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST... ? [%]

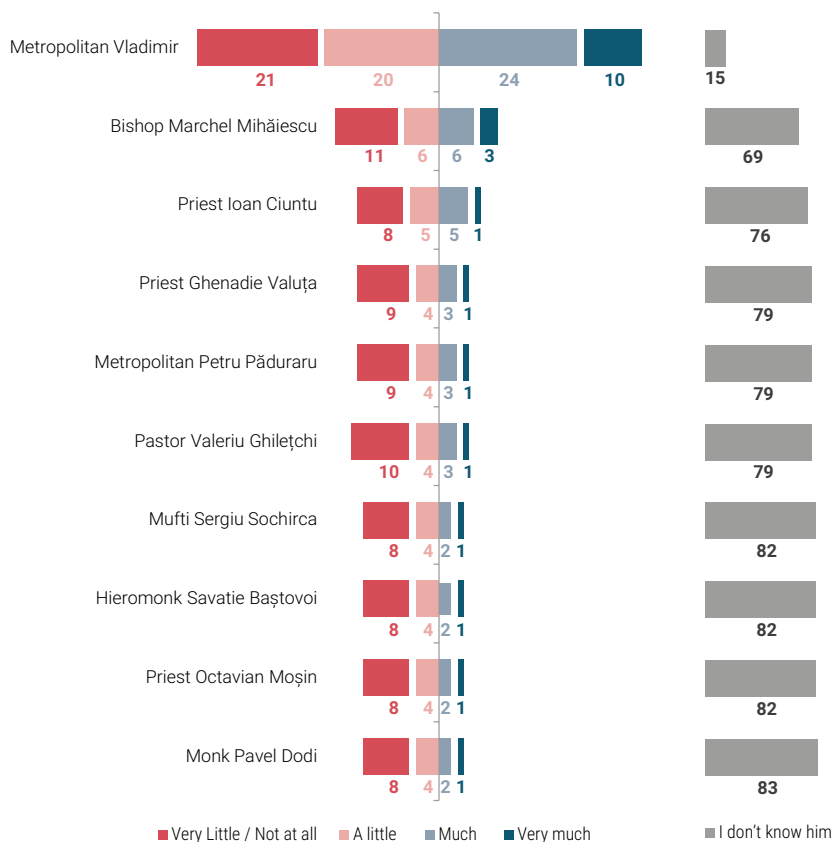
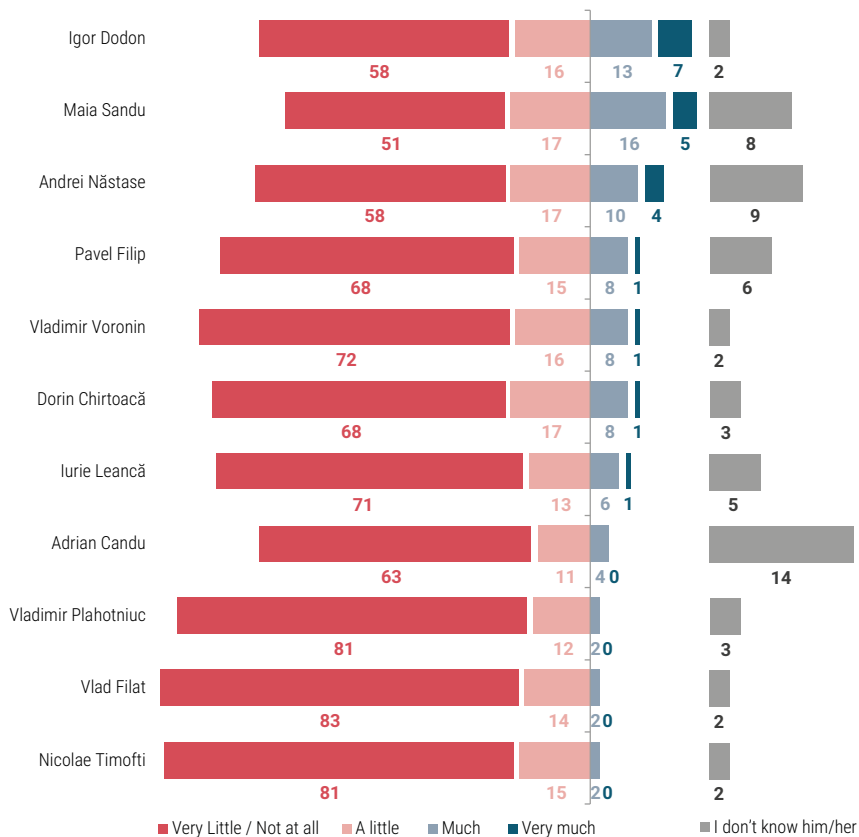


CHART 12. HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST... ? [%]



A different situation is that of the political leaders. Usually, the politicians about whom we asked were highly notorious (and usually seen as not being trustworthy at all). Even the most “popular” political leaders, at the time of the survey, did not reach levels of trust higher than 20%. At the same time, over 60% of the respondents did not trust them. We emphasize the fact that these data are from the end of August 2016, a time at which a presidential electoral campaign was underway in the Republic of Moldova. A survey taken at another point in the electoral cycle might lead to different rates of recognition for individual figures. However, this does not fundamentally affect the analysis because we do not foresee a sudden upsurge in the levels of trust | [CHART 12](#) |.

In conclusion, it is not likely that individual religious leaders can be very influential. There are two main reasons for this: the lack of notoriety and the fact that citizens do not perceive them as trustworthy. Consequently, we expect that Churches exert their influence through local leaders rather than through national leaders.

III. (In)tolerance and (non) discrimination

In this chapter we will analyze several variables that help shed some light on the social context. Specifically, we will discuss the issue of tolerance, showing that public opinion in the Republic of Moldova is skewed towards intolerance. We operationalize intolerance as a repudiation of social diversity. A related subject is that of social conservatism, which reaches similarly high values. We put forward descriptive indicators for both of these concepts. The chapter ends with a short overview of the way human rights are seen by the citizens of the Republic of Moldova.

High Levels of Intolerance

Accepting the existence of groups different from our own is one of the fundamentals of democratic societies. There are two main reasons for the importance tolerance has for democracy. First of all, when individuals are tolerant, trust-based social relationships emerge. In turn, these encourage cooperation and thus facilitate the resolution of collective problems. When high levels of intolerance plague a society, there is a potential for conflictual social relationships. To make matters worse, the members of the minority groups can withdraw from society (or can be pushed away from public life), which represents a restriction of their fundamental rights and a loss of human capital.

In order to measure the level of (in)tolerance we employed a classic instrument, the social distance scale. Respondents were asked to mention which groups they would not accept as: citizens of the Republic of Moldova, residents of the same locality, neighbors, friends, family members. The following table sums up the results | [TABLE 6](#) |.

How to read the table: 23% of the respondents would not accept as citizens of the Republic of Moldova other ethnic groups; 28% would not accept that other ethnic groups lived in their locality, etc.

The resulting image is telling: the larger the red bar, the more that group is rejected. The fact that the red bars dominate the table is a good indicator about the levels of intolerance, be it generalized or specific intolerance.

TABLE 6. I WOULD NOT ACCEPT... [%]

	To live in Moldova	To live in my locality	To be my neighbour	To be my friend	To be part of my family
Persons of different ethnicity	23	28	33	38	44
Roma / Gypsies	38	47	60	69	79
Jews	33	41	48	54	65
Sectants	60	68	75	80	86
Muslims	61	68	73	78	85
Homosexuals	84	89	94	95	97
Alcoholics	76	81	90	95	97
Drug users	84	89	95	97	99
Persons with HIV/AIDS	70	77	83	87	93

The **generalized intolerance** is proved by the fact that all social groups “different” from the majority are rejected. In order to simplify the discussion, we will discuss only the middle column, the case where members of a certain social group would be potential neighbors of the respondents. This involves a certain degree of interaction between the respondent and that person (you come across the neighbors on your street from time to time), but not as high as what would be expected between friends or family members. An accurate indicator of generalized intolerance is the average number of groups which were rejected by the respondents in a specific situation. For the Republic of Moldova, the value of that indicator is 6.5, on a 1-10 scale. It is a value that we regard as very high and associated with a high levels of intolerance. For comparison, in Romania, a country with a similar culture, the indicator of generalized intolerance had a value of 1.9 in 2011.⁶

The indicator of generalized intolerance is a bit higher (6.6) for the Orthodox respondents following the Moldovan Metropolitan Church. For the Bessarabian Metropolitan Church the value is 6.1 and for the other groups it is around 5. The frequent interactions with the church and the higher affinity for a conservative-religious program are associated with higher levels of intolerance. When the respondents are more educated, wealthier and use more information sources they tend to be more tolerant. Furthermore, the older a respondent the more probable it is that he/she is less tolerant. However, there is a remarkable exception to this trend: young people aged 18-24 are significantly more intolerant (the value of the indicator is 6.8) than the other age groups.

We use the phrase **specific intolerance** when we discuss about a particular group. The data show that there are four groups that are almost unanimously rejected: drug users, homosexuals, alcoholics and HIV/AIDS patients. These are highly specific and well defined groups. The least rejected group is at the same time the only one which is less precisely defined: “persons of another ethnic group/nationality”. At the same time, specifying an eth-

nic group (Roma, Jewish) is a predictor of increased intolerance levels.

These findings show that the Moldovan society is closed and reluctant to embrace diversity and minority groups. Most of the citizens reject “difference”, whether we refer to sexual preferences, ethnicity or religion. The rebuttal is stronger if the group is better defined.

Social Conservatism

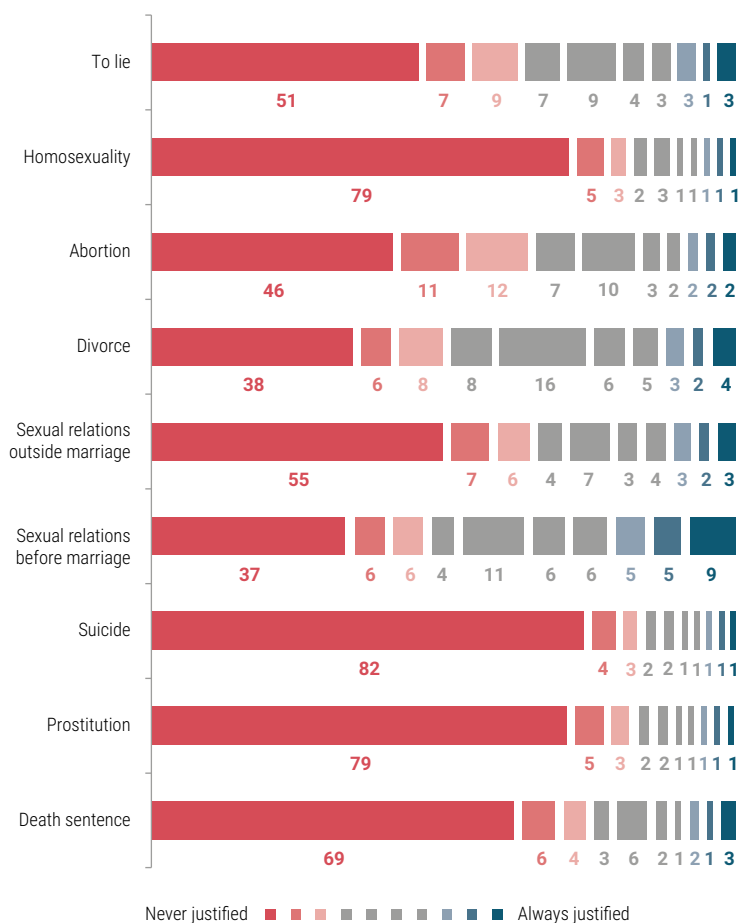
The high levels of intolerance can partially be attributed to the social conservatism that dominates public opinion in the Republic of Moldova. Social conservatism is conceptualized as a cluster of values that emphasize the importance of family, tradition, religious teachings and traditional gender roles. The classical model for revealing the values upheld by respondents is to confront them with counterfactual

scenarios that are at odds with their traditional values. The subjects are asked to say, on a scale of 1 to 10, to what extent can these situations be justified.

The respondents rejected the unconventional alternative in all of the counterfactual scenarios presented to them. Thus, they argued that under no circumstances those behaviors would be justified. We notice that homosexuality is rejected as much as suicide and prostitution. These three attitudes represent the hard core of social conservatism | CHART 13 |.

A potential explanation for these results is that the counterfactual scenarios are contrary to two overlapping value systems that continue to influence the ethical systems of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova – namely, Orthodoxy and Soviet communism. Taking this aspect into account, it is not surprising to see that everyday morality is shaped to a great ex-

CHART 13. SOCIAL CONSERVATORISM [%]



⁶ Voicu, O., Tufiş, C., Popescu, R., *Religie și comportament religios în România*, Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă România, Bucharest, 2011. [Religion and religious behavior in Romania]

tent by these two value systems. It should also be mentioned that the findings prove a systematic failure of the attempts to instill more progressive values through legal and educational instruments.

The research shows that society is more relaxed in regard to sexual relations before marriage or extramarital relations, abortion or even divorce (more relaxed does not mean that they are accepted, only that they are less rejected than the other behaviors). These are situations that are more common at an empirical level and, in fact, are tacitly accepted by the churches themselves.

We put forward a general indicator of social conservatism | CHART 14|. The indicator takes discrete values from 1 (very conservative; considers that the behaviors presented above are unjustifiable in all cases) to 10 (very progressive; considers that the behaviors presented above are justifiable in all cases). The national average is 2.5, a value which shows a high level of social conservatism. The following graphic presents the distribution of the social conservatism indicator for all respondents who had answered to at least one of the questions (the total number of cases is 1728). As it can be easily seen, the distribution is skewed towards conservatism. The most numerous subgroup (400 cases, 23% of the sample) is that of radical social conservative individuals, who consider that the analyzed behaviors are under no circumstances justifiable. Once again, as the next table shows, lower levels of conservatism are correlated with persons having greater financial, educational and/or informational resources. On the other hand, more frequent interactions with the church, a traditional type of religiosity and a propensity to a religious-conservative agenda are correlated with high levels of social conservatism. Since some situations are rejected by almost all respondents, the indicator does not vary a lot in different subgroups. The bulk of the variance is given by answers to other questions | TABLE 7|.

CHART 14. THE INDICATOR OF SOCIAL CONSERVATISM

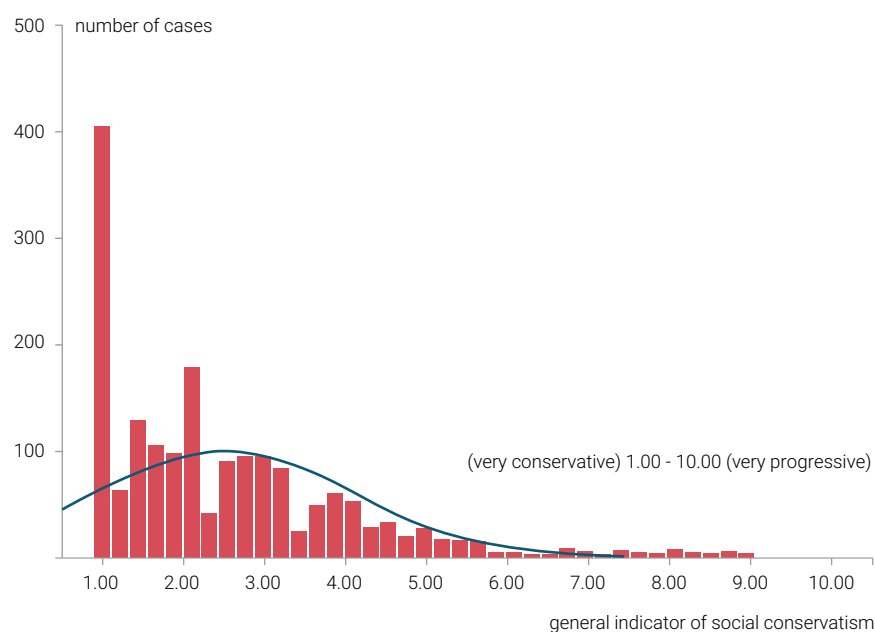


TABLE 7. THE INDICATOR OF SOCIAL CONSERVATISM

Sample average		2.5
Levels of educational attainment	Secondary school	2.4
	High school, professional schools	2.5
	Tertiary education	2.7
Rural/urban distribution	Rural	2.5
	Urban	2.5
Gender	Male	2.7
	Female	2.4
Personal income	No income	2.8
	Under 1000 lei	2.2
	1000-2500 lei	2.4
	Over 2500 lei	2.7
Age	Under 25 years old	3
	25-34	2.7
	35-44	2.6
	45-54	2.4
	55-64	2.2
	Over 65 years old	2
Affinity with the religious-conservative agenda	Yes	1.8
	No	2.6
Frequent interactions with the church	Yes	2.3
	No	2.6
Religion	Orthodox – Moldovan Metropolitan Church	2.5
	Orthodox – Bessarabian Metropolitan Church	2.8
	Protestant / Neo-protestant	2.3
	Atheists / agnostics	3.4
Type of religiosity	Diffuse	2.8
	Declared	2.7
	Individual	2.4
	Traditional	2.2

Perceptions of Human Rights

The survey also had an exploratory part referring to human rights. Usually, a high degree of social conservatism is correlated with the rejection of human rights, so this issue warrants discussion taking into account the context presented above. However, the subject of human rights will not be exhausted in this section, and we will return to it in the sections dedicated to the qualitative dimension of the research.

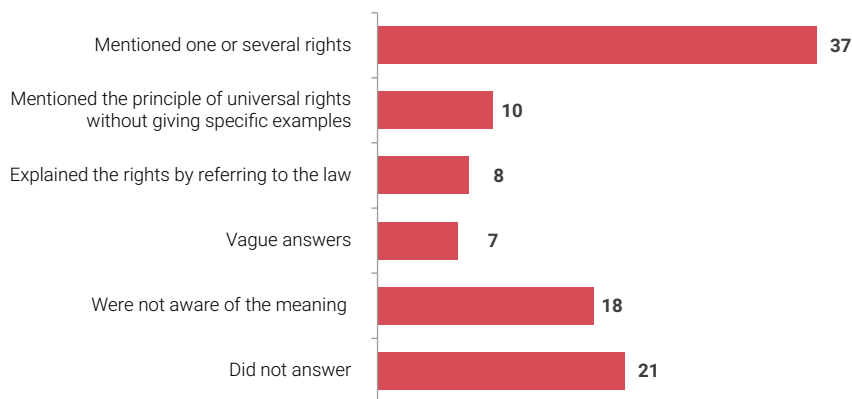
Quantitative studies usually do not tackle the subject of human rights due to its high level of conceptualization. We used an open question in order to see what citizens of the Republic of Moldova understand by "human rights". Most of the respondents tried to answer; those answers have been grouped in several categories

CHART 15 |

- 37% of the respondents were able to mention one or several rights. Among these we mention: the right to free speech, the right to freedom, the right to life, the right to dignity, social-economic rights (the right to have a workplace, the right to medical assistance, the right to a decent life);
- 10% directly or indirectly mentioned the principle of universal rights, but without giving specific examples;
- 8% explained the rights by referring to the law, considering that "you have the right to do what the legislation allows you to do";
- 7% provided vague answers, such as "human rights should be respected", "our rights are violated", "democracy", "peace" or other general answers;
- 18% mentioned that they were not aware of the meaning of "human rights";
- 21% did not offer any answer.

Irrespective of the answers given to the previously mentioned question, the majority of the respondents believe that human rights are not respected in the Republic of Moldova. More specifically, 42% said that human rights are respected to a little extent, while 49% said that these are barely or not at all respected. Furthermore, only 6% and respectively 1% said that human rights are respected very much or to a great extent. Nevertheless, these responses could indicate a general state of dissatisfaction with the government or a particular lack of appreciation of the justice system rather than a familiarity with the subject of human rights and its problems.

CHART 15. TYPOLOGY OF ANSWERS TO "WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY HUMAN RIGHTS?" [%]



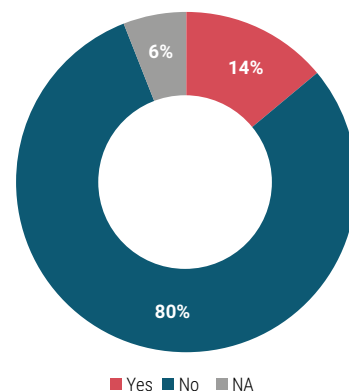
On the other hand, given the aforementioned results, it is surprising that an international juridical instrument – the European Convention of Human Rights is relatively well known. Asked whether they had heard about it, 42% of the individuals inquired gave a positive answer, 53% a negative one and 5% didn't give any answer. Another reason why we mention that this is a surprising finding is that such instruments are not usually widely known. It is possible that some of the positive answers can be traced back to the phenomenon of social desirability. This phenomenon could be mitigated to a certain extent due to the plethora of instances when the European Court of Human Rights was involved in litigations between the citizens and the state. A quarter of the individuals in the sample gave an answer to the question what the European Convention of Human Rights meant for them and for the Republic of Moldova. Almost all of the individuals who had given an answer to that question considered it a positive institution, arguing that it was an instrument that defended and guaranteed everyone's rights.

A thematically appropriate indicator is perceived religious discrimination. In order to measure it we put a direct question, namely "Have you ever heard of situations where individuals are discriminated or treated worse than others because they have another religious affiliation than the majority of citizens?" 14% of the individuals answered affirmatively | CHART 16 |. We find this a relatively high value, especially since we deal with a social conservative and intolerant environment. In such environments discrimination is not usually acknowledged. Inquired about such cases, only 3% reported a personal experience (or an experience reported by someone they knew), 8% said that they had heard

about it from relatives or friends and 3% remembered hearing about it in the mass-media (the question was addressed only to the 14% who had heard about discrimination cases).

Social networks are thus a more important source of knowledge in this regard than mass media. We encounter a similar situation when it comes to the violation of the right to religious freedom, which will be dealt with in depth in the next chapter. Those who reported being familiar with cases of violations of the right of religious freedom overlap quite a lot with those who reported being aware of situations of religious discrimination. Thus, we can infer that they had in mind the same situations. Usually, those who were mentioned as victims of religious discrimination were members of minority confessional communities. Only 10% of the respondents gave a concrete answer (the most recurrent answers pointed at the members of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Baptist Church, or Muslims).

CHART 16. ARE YOU AWARE OF SITUATIONS IN WHICH PEOPLE ARE DISCRIMINATED OR TREATED DIFFERENTLY, DUE TO HAVING A DIFFERENT RELIGION OR BELIEF THAN THE MAJORITY OF CITIZENS? [%]



IV. Religion, Politics and Policies

The relation between the State and the Church is the outcome of both institutional mechanisms and the impact of public opinion. Whenever a Church advances an opinion regarding a legislative project or a priest endorses a candidate, a transfer of influence between Church and the State occurs. The Church has two means of influencing the political: religious-conservative public policies and direct involvement in political affairs. These mechanisms are going to be analyzed in this chapter.

The Social Conservative Agenda's Potential for Influencing Public Policies

In this section we are going to analyze the extent to which citizens of the Republic of Moldova would be willing to approve public policies that aim at promoting religious values: teaching religion in school, regulating abortion, public financing of religious institutions, legally limiting the rights of same sex couples and limiting the right to religious freedom. Each of these topics is influential in the global debate on state and religion and it is inevitable that they will emerge in the Republic of Moldova, albeit the fact that at the present moment not all of these are discussed or widely known.

It is not mandatory that religious organizations actively promote these topics (or oppose them) and our analysis does not refer to this aspect. Taking into account the survey data, we measure citizens' opinions and perceptions and attempt to determine to what extent they would endorse or oppose specific measures. Towards the end of the chapter we will have built an indicator through which we hope to accurately measure the proportion of the population that would advocate for a religious-conservative agenda.

Teaching Religion in Public Schools

The debate on religion as a compulsory school subject is a constant in European countries. Whether religion should be a subject at all in public schools has generated numerous discussions. Where religious education is permitted, legislators have to decide whether it will be compulsory or not, whether it will be con-

CHART 17. LATELY THERE HAVE BEEN MANY DISCUSSIONS ABOUT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN PUBLIC PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS COMES CLOSEST TO YOUR OPINION ABOUT THIS? [%]

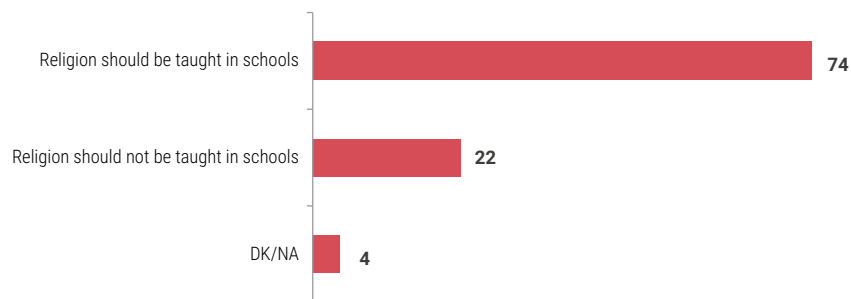
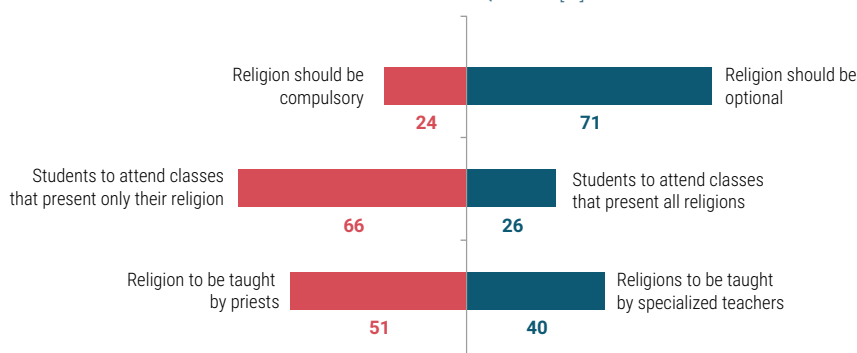


CHART 18. IF THE OFFICIAL DECISION WERE TO HAVE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SOLUTIONS WOULD BE THE MOST ADEQUATE? [%]



fessional or non-confessional, whether it will present the teachings of one particular confessional community or whether it will be more like a history of religious ideas, and whether it will be taught by specialized teachers or by church representatives.

In Europe there are several ways that the educational policies adopted and implemented by the state have dealt with this issue.⁷ France, for instance, has completely separated public education from religious education. Other countries, such as Romania, still favor the inclusion of religion in the national curriculum. In Romania, religious education is confessional, and there are partnerships with the officially recognized denominations.

The survey data show that 74% of the respondents agree with the statement that religion should be taught in schools. Only 22% agree with the opposite point of view, that religion should not be taught in schools | **CHART 17** |. It is interesting to mention that women favor religious edu-

cation to a higher degree than men (80% of the women agreed with the positive statement, while only 67% men agreed with it). Similarly, fewer Russian-speaking citizens consider that religion has to be taught in schools (66%) than Romanian-speaking citizens (76%)⁸. Somewhat foreseeable, the shares of respondents who consider that religious education should be taught in schools are lower for those with higher levels of educational attainment, for those who live in urban areas or for youngsters, albeit the fact that in none of these cases the percentage drops under 60%. The responses are more balanced among students and pupils: 56% would want to study religion, 44% would not.

The respondents were then asked to indicate which of the several solutions presented to them would be the most adequate if the official decision to introduce religious education were made | **CHART 18** |. Most of them (71%) would prefer religion

⁷ We refer to all the European countries, not only those members of the European Union, because the Republic of Moldova is not part of the latter.

⁸ The expressions "Russian-speaking citizens" and "Romanian-speaking citizens" do not indicate that these individuals speak one language exclusively; they refer to the preference each has for one language or the other.

to be an optional, not a compulsory subject. Only 24% would like religion to be a compulsory subject. At the same time, two-thirds of the respondents (66%) chose the conservative solution that pupils should only be taught about their own religion. Furthermore, 51% believe that religion should be taught by priests. But for a regulation of religious education, there is a risk that schools and communities opt for optional religious classes, taught by priests, either because they find it desirable or because there are pressures from the church to introduce such classes. Such a solution would result in a dogmatic way of teaching religion, especially in a closed and conservative society. We will return to this discussion in the section in which we analyze the interview data.

Each of the previous solutions presented respondents with a more “conservative” option (those from the left column) and a more “progressive” one (those from the right column). According to their answers, we split the respondents in three categories: the “conservatives” (48%) are those who chose at least two answers from the left column; the “progressivists” (38%) are the ones who chose at least two answers from the right column; the “undecideds” (14%) are those who chose at least two times the “I don’t know” or “I don’t want to answer” options. From this point of view, the answers are more balanced than it would be inferred by only looking at the first question that strictly refers to teaching religion in school.

Taking a closer look at the data, we notice that 10% of the individuals are “strongly progressive” (that is, they chose the progressive answer every time), while 12% are “strongly conservative” (they chose every time the conservative answer). What this means is that for three-quarters of the population the debate remains open (we include here the 39% “rather conservatives”, 14% “undecided” and 25% “rather progressivists”).

Forbidding Abortion

The voluntary interruption of pregnancy is an important topic in all the countries with a majority of Christian citizens. All Christian churches strictly reject abortion, criticizing both the woman and the doctor involved in the surgery. At the same time, in numerous countries, especially in the former Communist areas of Europe, abortion remains a prominent birth con-

CHART 19. ABORTION... [%]

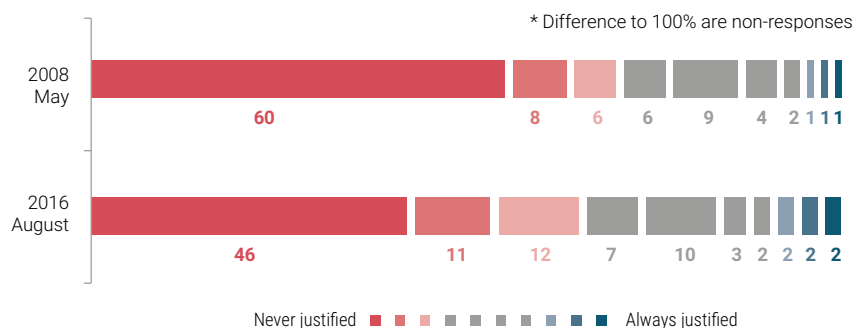


CHART 20. DO YOU AGREE WITH THE VOLUNTARY INTERRUPTION OF PREGNANCY (ABORTION) WHEN THE PARENTS DO NOT WANT TO HAVE A CHILD? [%]

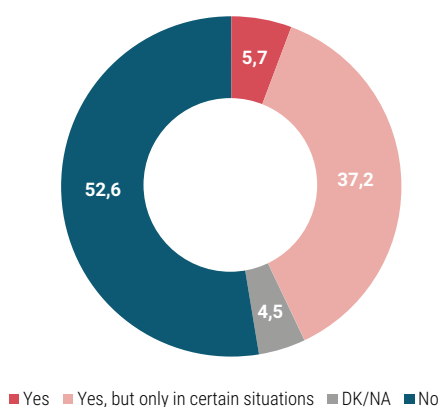
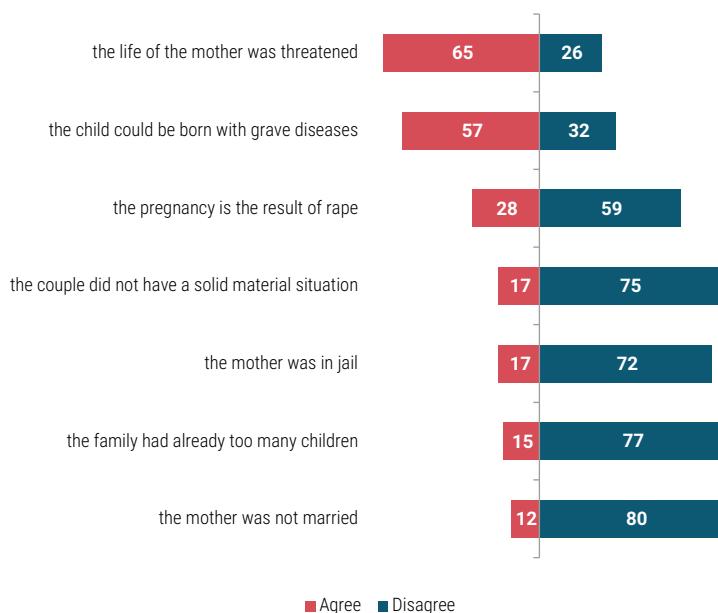


CHART 21. WOULD YOU AGREE WITH ABORTION IF... [%]



trol method, whereas other contraceptive methods are scarcely used. The Republic of Moldova is no exception: according to the official data, there have been around 14,000 abortions per year for the last few years; slightly rephrased, this means that that 1 woman in 15 has had an abortion in that period ⁹. Most of the abortions have social or economic causes (and thus do not represent medical decisions). Thus, a conflict occurs between the declared moral value and practice.

In order to measure the moral approval rate of pregnancy interruption, we asked the respondents to say to what degree they believe that abortion is justifiable, using a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means that it is not at all justified and 10 means that it is completely justified. The same question was used in the 2008 European Values Study (EVS) international study, a fact that allows us to observe the evolution in time of citizens' opinion about this subject. In the adjacent graphic we grouped the respondents in three categories: "conservatives" (answered 1-3 on the 1-10 scale, red on the graphic), "liberals" (answered 8-10, blue) and "neutral" (4-7, middle of the scale, gray) | CHART 19 |. Looking at the colors we can easily see that the share of the "conservatives" is larger than that of the "liberals", but it has faded with time.

The question "Would you agree with the voluntary interruption of pregnancy (abortion) when the parents do not want to have a child?" adds to the moral dimension a well-defined context. When confronted solely with the moral dimension of abortion, the respondents reject abortion and find it unjustifiable. However, if we add a well-defined context – that the parents do not want to have a child – the results change a bit. Those who completely reject the idea of abortion continue to represent the majority (53%), but 37% say that they would accept such a decision under certain circumstances, and 6% say that they would accept the decision under any circumstances | CHART 20 |. A series of questions with even more concrete contexts indicate the main circumstances under which citizens of the Republic of Moldova would approve the voluntary interruption of pregnancy: if the mother's life is endangered (65%) or if the child would be born with severe dis-

abilities (57%). Both are medical reasons. The other tested reasons, which pertain to social or economic aspects, were rejected by most of the respondents, as the adjacent graphic shows | CHART 21 |.

Similarly to the case of teaching religion, the elderly, those with lower levels of educational attainment, those less financially endowed and those living in rural areas reject abortion more often than other groups in all the presented scenarios. Surprisingly, unlike in other countries, women are more likely to be conservative than men. Among the age group 35-44, however, we find the lowest percentage of those who reject abortion (44%), probably because those persons imagine themselves with ease in such a situation.

Recognizing Same-sex Couples

Another sensitive subject from the churches' standpoint is that of same sex couples. Homosexuality is harshly reprovved, and discussions about legalizing same sex unions infuriate most of the churches. In the last few years, many countries of the European Union introduced legal instruments for recognizing same-sex couples, either through marriage or through civil

partnership¹⁰. This has generated church reactions, including in countries that are not part of the European Union, such as the Republic of Moldova.

We measured the degree of acceptance of homosexuality in the Republic of Moldova on a 10-point scale, where 1 means that it is not justified at all and 10 that it is completely justified. The same question was used in the previously cited 2008 EVS study, which allows us to compare the results. In both cases, the conservative position is overwhelming: 85% of the respondents from the 2008 study and 87% of the respondents from our 2016 study reject homosexuality as such (graphically represented with red) | CHART 22 |.

Given this lack of endorsement of homosexuality, it is not surprising that the citizens of the Republic of Moldova reject any form of official recognition for same-sex couples. 94% reject recognizing marriage, and 92% reject the alternative option of civil partnership | CHART 23 |.

¹⁰ Civil partnership is recognized through a contract between two persons who want to live together. The contract is recognized by the civil code and bestows upon these persons several rights, some similar to or identical to those conferred by marriage.

CHART 22. HOMOSEXUALITY IS... [%]

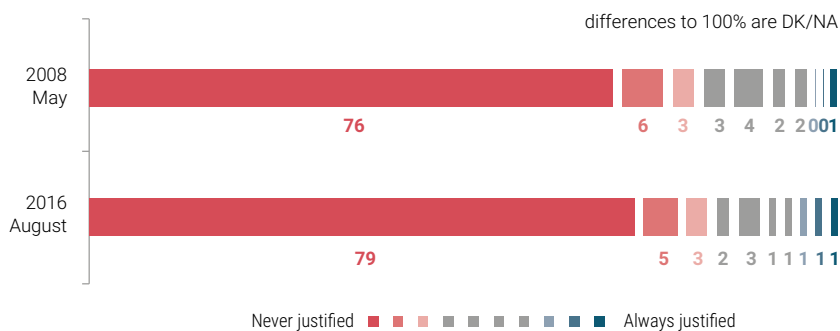
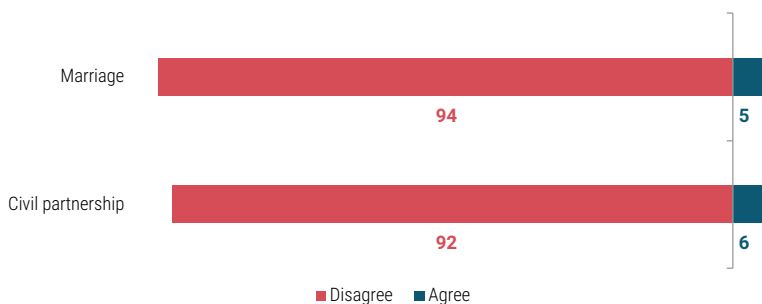


CHART 23. ACCEPTANCE OF LEGAL FORMS OF SAME-SEX COUPLES RECOGNITION [%]



⁹According to the official statistics of the National Bureau for Statistics.

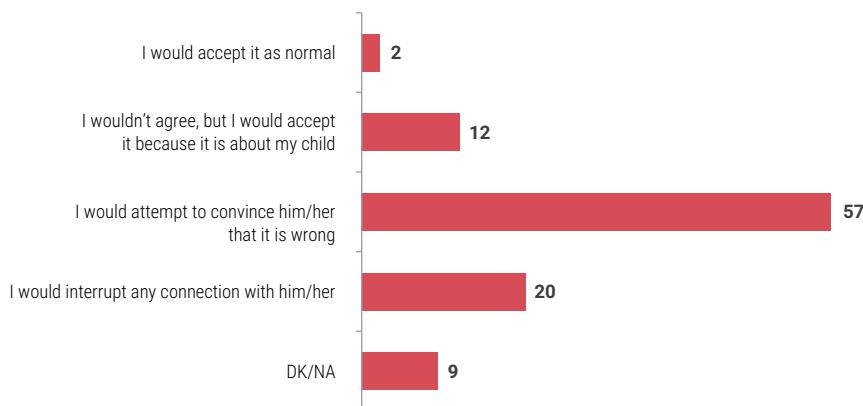
We also put the respondents into a hypothetical situation in which their child announced that he or she had a different sexual orientation. Although the bulk of responses stick to the conservative trend, there are some departures from the results to the previously mentioned question regarding homosexuality in general. Only 14% of the respondents said that they would accept this: it is a small percentage, but significantly higher than the percentage of those who say that homosexuality is justifiable (3%) or of those who would accept that same-sex couples be legalized (5% marriage and 6% civil partnership). At the opposite end we have the 20% who would cease talking to their child. We can only believe that the 9% who did not answer the question would have a serious ethical dilemma on their hands. The most populous group consists of those respondents who would be against such a decision, and would try to convince their child to choose otherwise. Asked about how they would try to change their child's orientation, 37% of those who would try to change their child's mind say that they would resort to arguments of religion, tradition and normality; 5% would use reason and 1% would be willing to resort to violence | CHART 24 |.

Freedom to Exercise Religion

The free exercise of religion is a constitutional right, but the formal enunciation of the right does not entail that the right is fully respected. In the Republic of Moldova the discussions on religious freedom involve most of the time legal arguments and concrete examples. A survey operates with opinions and perceptions. It cannot show us how things really stand at an empirical level, but it can indicate to us what individuals believe about the subject.

We tested how much the respondents cared about the principle of religious freedom. In order to avoid any potential social desirability bias effect, we circumvented the direct question ("do you agree with the principle that one has to have the freedom to exercise religion?"), which usually results in positive answers. Instead, we asked respondents to choose between the scenario where everyone is free to practice any religion and the one in which only state-recognized religions are admitted. The second scenario is a slightly less personalized version of

CHART 24. LET'S ASSUME THAT YOUR CHILD TOLD YOU THAT HE/SHE HAD A DIFFERENT SEXUAL ORIENTATION. HOW WOULD YOU REACT?



rejecting the right to religious freedom, since one shares the responsibility for denying this right to someone with the state. The results, however, are concerning for someone preoccupied with human rights: 59% of the respondents said that anyone is free to practice any religion, but 38% would accept only officially recognized denominations.

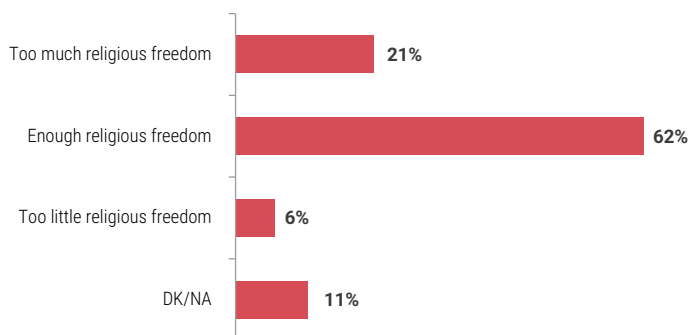
A second question had respondents assess the state of religious freedom in the Republic of Moldova. Most of the respondents (62%) considered that there is enough religious freedom, 21% that there was too much and only 6% that there is too little (11% had no opinion regarding this issue) | CHART 25 |.

We tried to better define what the respondents had in mind when they gave their answers to that question by resorting to an open follow-up question. Those who said that there was too much religious freedom usually considered that

there "were too many religions", an idea expressed in a variety of ways by at least 75% of these individuals (out of the 21% who gave this answer, so almost 12% of the sample). Other answers go towards lamenting the loss of a "normal order of things" (people ceased to believe in God, there are too many divorces, there are high levels of libertinism, etc.), but also decry the way priests usually act (they ask for money, they fail to do their duty, etc.). The respondents who considered that there was too little religious freedom and also answered the open question indicated, in one form or another, that some minority religions are discriminated or marginalized.

The questionnaire also had a question regarding the respondents' opinion on hindering religious exercise: "To the best of your knowledge, are there people who cannot exercise their right to religious freedom in the Republic of Moldova?" The responses were mainly negative: no,

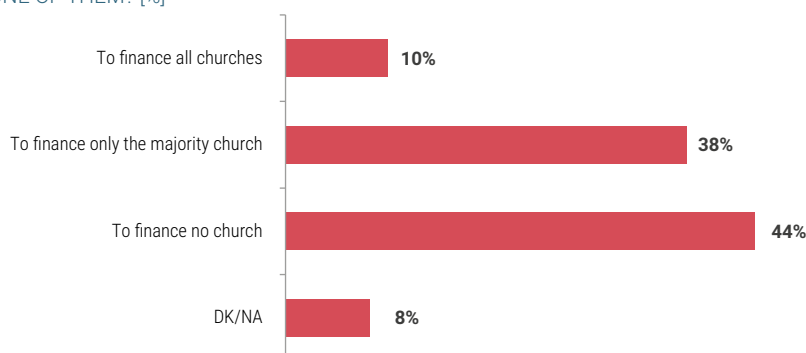
CHART 25. IN GENERAL, DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THERE IS TOO MUCH, TOO LITTLE OR ENOUGH RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA? [%]



nobody is hindered in exercising her religion, according to 82% of the individuals from the sample. Only 9% gave a positive answer (9% had no opinion) | **CHART 26** |. We further asked those who gave a positive answer which groups have difficulties in exercising their religious freedom, but the percentage of those who answered this follow-up question (5%) is too small to lead to valid statistical inferences. The most recurrent answers are Jehovah's Witnesses, the members of the Baptist Church, Muslims and a general answer such as "all sects". It is interesting to note that according to the respondents, their acquaintances represent the main source of information on this subject, with mass media taking only second place. What this means is that news about religious discrimination is mostly available through social networks and is scarce in the mainstream mass media.

At the same time, 14% of the citizens consider that in the Republic of Moldova there are religious organizations or churches which misuse the religious freedom. It is not surprising that all of these individuals belong to the group of those who believe that there is enough or too much religious freedom. This result explains why the answers they gave to the follow-up question regarding what organizations they were talking about were Jehovah's Witnesses, the Baptist Church, Muslims and the general answer "all sects". This shows that what counts for a small part of the society as a limitation on religious freedom is considered by a much larger part of society to be a misuse of religious freedom. We should mention that just 1.9% of the sample (*i.e.*, less than the margin of error) believe that the Orthodox Church misuses its right to religious freedom | **CHART 27** |.

CHART 28. DO YOU THINK THE STATE SHOULD FINANCE ONLY ONE CHURCH, ALL CHURCHES OR NONE OF THEM? [%]



These evaluations of the state of religious freedom – “too much”, “too little”, “enough” – do not measure the juridical knowledge of the respondents, but can be very helpful for those who might want to anticipate how the citizens would feel about a public policy regarding this issue. The attempt to legally intervene for improving the freedom of religious exercise will probably be met with backlash, given the fact that most of the citizens consider that there is already enough religious freedom, if not too much.

Public Funding of Churches

Another potentially controversial public policy would be one about the public funding of churches. Such a measure is ubiquitous in countries with an Orthodox majority, and it has been criticized many times for being discriminatory against minority religious groups.

In the Republic of Moldova, almost half of the citizens (48%) embrace the idea of public funding for churches. What is worrisome is that most of these (38%) would be willing to fund only the majority religion, and only 10% would accept funding all denominations. However, the most frequent answer (44%) is “no religion should be funded”.

We included a question about an alternative type of funding through fiscal measures: “would you agree with the exemption of religious organizations from paying taxes to the state?” The answers have been usually negative: 64% of the respondents said that they would not agree, 28% that they would and 8% had no opinion | **CHART 28** |.

CHART 26. TO THE BEST OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE, ARE THERE PEOPLE WHO CANNOT EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA? [%]

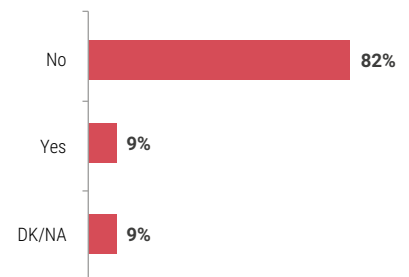
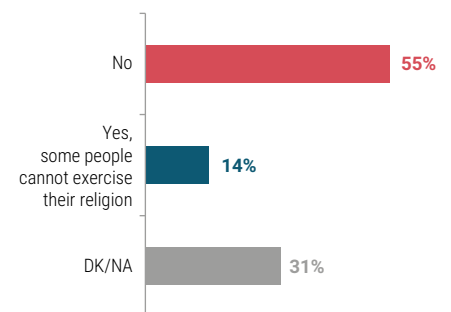


CHART 27. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA THERE ARE RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS OR CHURCHES THAT MISUSE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM? [%]

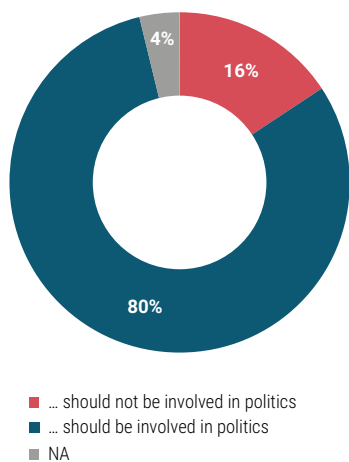


Religion's Influence in Politics

The first level of analysis tries to unearth how citizens feel in regard to the direct involvement of the church in politics. To this end we put forward a question about Church involvement. The results show that 82% of the respondents believe that the Church should be neutral when it comes to political affairs. Only 13% believe that the Church should be involved in political life | **CHART 29** |. This significant difference between the two opposite views shows clearly that a potential attempt of a Church to intervene directly in political life would not be welcomed by the citizens.

On the other hand, this does not mean that the Church lacks other indirect mechanisms for influencing the political. The most convenient one is the existence of faithful people in the public administration. Another means of influencing the political would be through priests who could recommend a certain candi-

CHART 29. AS FAR AS YOU ARE CONCERNED, THE CHURCH... [%]



date (who would thus be “backed by the Church”). A more direct type of intervention would be to nominate priests as candidates, in order to represent the interests of their religious organizations.

We measured citizens’ agreement or disagreement with a potential Church influence on the political by looking at their answers to the three aforementioned possible mechanisms of more or less veiled involvement in political life. As the adjacent graphic shows, there are more favorable answers than unfavorable for two of the questions | CHART 30 |. The first one (70% to 25%) is the one about faithful people being employed in the public administration. The second one refers to the important role of religion in the development of the country, rejected by 33% and approved by 61%. This is a weak and indirect influence because faithful people are not necessarily those who listen to Church teachings, but those who respect the morality of their faith. The fact that there is such a high level of acceptance can be traced to the fact that citizens are constantly criticizing politicians’ lack of ethical precepts.

CHART 30. TO WHAT EXTEND DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING?

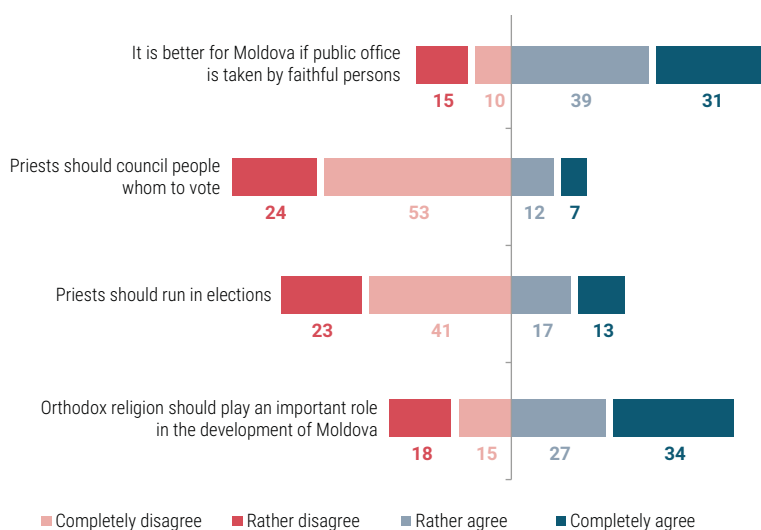
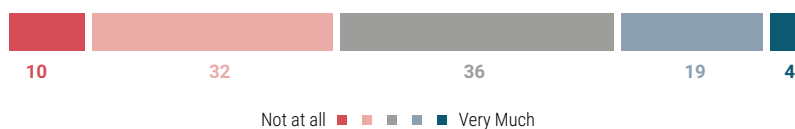


CHART 31. TO WHAT EXTEND DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING?



The respondents firmly reject the idea that priests should indicate how people should vote. 77% of them are opposed to this idea. 64% also say that priests should not be nominated on party lists or run in other types of political elections. We can understand these questions in the same individual/institutional key: the priests could be approved as candidates due to their positive features, but the idea that churches endorse an individual at an institutional level is rather rejected than accepted.

The answers to the questions mentioned above construe a society in which faith is an important criterion for selecting the elites, but in which only a minority would be willing to accept a direct, institutional involvement of the Churches in political life. In order to assess the size of this minority, we built an indicator based on the number of statements (from the four mentioned above) for which the respondent chose an answer favorable to the increase of religious influence in political life. This indicator takes values from 0 (if 4 answers unfavorable to the Church were selected) to 4 (if answers in all 4 cases were favorable to the Church). The adjacent graphic shows the distribution of the answers. It conveys the image of a polarized society: a traditional nucleus (23%) would endorse the increase of religious influence in the political life, a plurality (42%) has a more secularist view and a relatively high percentage of people (36%) do not lean conclusively towards one variant or the other | CHART 31 |. We emphasize once again the fact that these are those who consider that faith should play an important role in politics, but reject the idea that Churches could be institutionally involved in politics.

The attitude towards the religious influence in politics could also be measured by presenting the respondents with some hypothetical scenarios, where a single characteristic of a politician is emphasized, and the participants are then asked to say how probable it is that they would vote for such a candidate.

The first set of questions was intended to gauge the perceptions of the politicians who resort to religious arguments in the electoral campaign. This was the best-received type of politician: 58% had a positive perception and only 34% a negative one. Respondents were usually against the politicians who used religion in their political activity (64% said that they would not vote for him/her, 27% said

CHART 32. HOW PROBABLE IS IT THAT WOULD VOTE FOR A POLITICIAN WHO...[%]

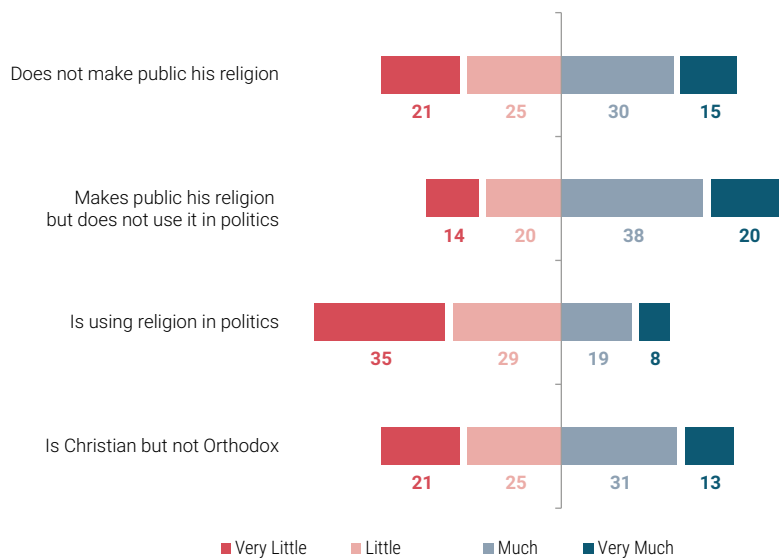
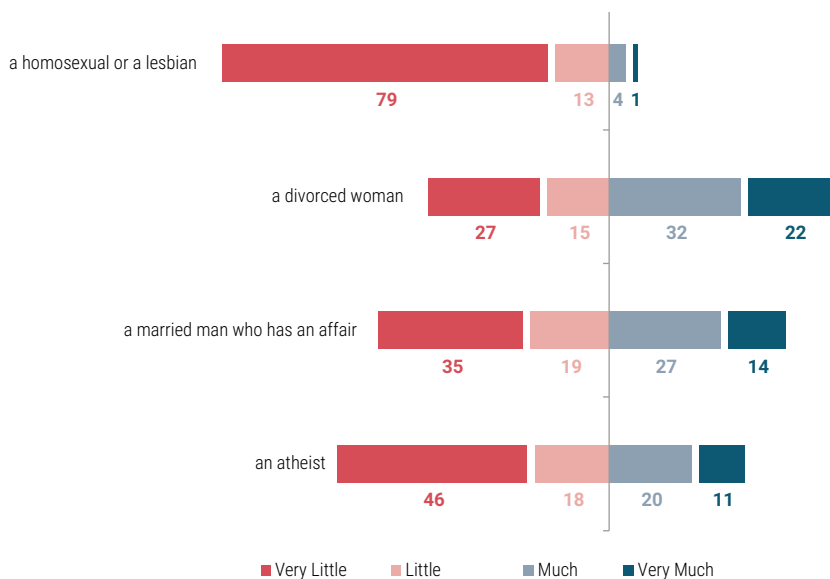


CHART 33. HOW PROBABLE IS IT THAT YOU WOULD VOTE FOR... [%]



that they would). Opinions are split when it comes to those who hide their religion (46% perceive this as a negative element, 45% as a positive one) and to non-Orthodox Christians (46% of the respondents consider this a negative feature, 44% a positive one) | CHART 32 |.

A second set of questions referred to counterfactual scenarios which emphasize a feature that is usually morally blamed, but not legally forbidden. (For instance, we did not include a thief, which is a feature both morally and legally condemned). The homosexual, the divorced

woman, the married man with a mistress, and the atheist represent in Christian societies categories that do not make respectable politicians. Their rejection by the respondents shows the influence that traditional morality exerts in society. As might be expected, the chances for a politician who openly admitted that he/she has a sexual orientation different from the majority would be pretty slim. Most of the respondents would also not vote for an atheist (64%) or for a man with a mistress (54%). As a point of divergence, a slight majority would vote for a divorced woman (54%) | CHART 33 |.

In regard to this set of questions we must mention the fact that the traditionalist opinions stick together. Excluding the case of homosexuals, which are almost unanimously rejected, we observe that 33% of the citizens reject all three profiles corresponding to “immoral politicians” (that is, they say in every case that they would not vote, or that it is not likely they would vote, for such a politician). At the opposite end, 26% of the respondents answer favorably to those types of politicians in all three cases. The intermediary groups have similar shares: 22% reject just a profile and 20% reject two such profiles.

“The Religious-conservative Party”

The answers point to the image of a society polarized by the subject “religion and politics”. If a politician chose to use religious themes in his electoral campaign he would have similar chances of attracting and rejecting voters (of course, this would also depend on other elements from that person’s demeanor). At the same time, however, a politician could choose a religious-conservative discourse in order to target a certain group. On the one hand, this could bring him/her a sufficient number of votes to be elected to Parliament, and on the other, it could bring visibility to the conservative agenda in the public sphere.

Those who consider propitious the Church involvement in politics represent a minority. However, we have witnessed throughout history how an active minority, if it is resolute and resourceful, can advance its interests and even manage to impose its own agenda. It is usually said that the Republic of Moldova is facing an elite crisis. One of the symptoms of this crisis is the fact that the main parties lose their supporters and that many citizens believe that there are no political parties that adequately represent them. Asked whether they feel close to a political party, only 36% of the respondents gave a positive answer. The list of parties presented to them also contained the newest political parties. New parties thus have significant room for manoeuvre. These do not necessarily have to be mass parties; they could be niche parties which promote a well-defined agenda, meant to cajole a specific part of the electorate. A party with a religious-conservative agenda could be such a party.

It is self-evident that such a party would promote first of all a Christian morality. However, all the main parties do that, irrespective of their official ideology, because it represents such an important topic for most citizens, as shown by the present research. If a party wanted to differentiate itself from the others on religious grounds, it would have to put forward a series of public policies which overlap with those of the majority Church.

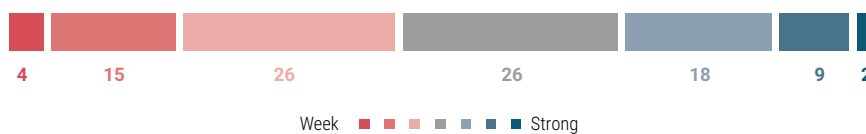
The previously analyzed subjects could amount to such an agenda. These could be split into two main categories: public policies bearing religious-conservative influences and the influence of religion in politics. We chose these two subjects because they reappear on the public agenda in several countries, being part of an ongoing global debate. Thus, they could be reflected in the public opinion from the Republic of Moldova.

We tried to build such a potential agenda, selecting the following subjects: public funding of churches; teaching religion in schools; limiting the right to abortion; rejecting sexual minorities; rejecting “immoral politicians” and increasing the influence of religion in political life.

The following table presents the indicators used for measuring each of the five subjects mentioned above and the percentage of the population which shares the conservative opinion | TABLE 8 |.

The groups highlighted through the percentage from the last column do not overlap. For instance, there are persons who are favorable to some forms of religious education, but who oppose abortion. For every two subjects we can find

CHART 34. DEGREE OF AFFINITY WITH THE RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVE AGENDA [%]



such examples. At the intersection of the six groups we can build an indicator which shows the degree of affinity with the religious conservative agenda. As the following graphic shows, there are 7 layers of this indicator | CHART 34 |.

Those with the weakest degree of affinity (4% of the population) are those who do not fit any of the options mentioned above. Those who are in at least one group represent 15% of the population; 26% fit in two groups and 26% in three groups. Those with the highest degree of affinity (those who embrace all six conservative options) represent only 2% of the population, while those who embrace four of the six – 18% and those who embrace five of the six – 9%.

We can say that those who would represent the likely voters of a potential conservative-religious party are those who chose five or six conservative options. Relaxing the condition could increase the number of potential supporters, but at the same time would dilute too much the agenda, which would become similar to that of some mainstream parties. In order to differentiate itself from the existent parties, a new party would have to adopt a more radical stance. We are thus talking of a potential electorate of 11% of the population | TABLE 9 |. Would this minority be an active one and resourceful, which, as mentioned

above, are critical criteria for its being influential? The answer is rather negative. The respondents who chose either five or six of the conservative options are usually members of social categories which lack resources and which are more reluctant to be active on the political scene. Unsurprisingly, the literature and previous studies have argued that less resourceful individuals tend to be more conservative. For instance, 30% of those with very low incomes (under 400 lei/month) have a high affinity for the conservative agenda, in comparison to only 9% of those with high incomes (1,000 – 2,500 lei) and 6% of those with high incomes (over 2,500 lei). More respondents come from rural areas (19%) than from urban areas (7%). Classifying the respondents according to educational attainment levels, social-conservatives amount to 16% of those with primary education, 10% of those with secondary education and 4% of those with tertiary education. Their share is above the national average in regard to age only for those over 60 years old (16%), the share decreasing under 8% for those under 30 years old. Similarly, we notice that pensioners, housewives, the unemployed, and agriculture workers lean towards the right of the scale whereas those with more active professions lean towards the left of the scale. Briefly, the analyzed group of persons with a high level of affinity for the conservative-religious agenda is com-

TABLE 8. CONSERVATIVE-RELIGIOUS AGENDA

Subject	Conservative option	Percentage of the individuals who endorse that option
Public funding of Churches	They believe that the State should only fund the majority religion	38%
Teaching religion in schools	They choose at least two of the following options: religion should be a compulsory subject; religion should be taught by priests; students should participate in classes where they are only taught about their religion	48%
Abortion	They reject abortion under any circumstances	53%
Sexual minorities	They would try to change their child's mind if he told them that he was not heterosexual or would reject him	77%
Church influence in politics	They choose the conservative option for at least three of the following statements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> it is fine if priests recommend some candidates to the citizens; it would be better for the Republic of Moldova if most of the public administration jobs belonged to faithful people; it would be better if priests entered electoral competition; Orthodoxy should play an important role in the development of the Republic of Moldova. 	28%
“Immoral politicians”	They reject all “immoral politician” profiles	33%

TABLE 9. STRONG AFFINITY WITH THE CONSERVATIVE – RELIGIOUS AGENDA

Sample average		11%
Level of educational attainment	Secondary school	16%
	High school, professional school	10%
	Higher education	4%
Rural/urban	Rural	19%
	Urban	7%
Preferred language	Russian	10%
	Romanian	11%
Gender	Man	12%
	Woman	9%
Personal income	No income	12%
	Under 1000 lei	14%
	1000-2500 lei	9%
	Over 2500 lei	6%
Interested in politics	A lot and very much	4%
	A little and not at all	12%
Age	Under 25 years old	7%
	25-34	9%
	35-44	10%
	45-54	11%
	55-64	12%
	Over 65 years old	13%
Religion	Orthodox – Moldovan Metropolitan Church	13%
	Orthodox – Bessarabian Metropolitan Church	6%
	Protestant or Neo-Protestant	9%
	Atheist/Agnostic	4%
Frequent interactions with the church	Yes	15%
	No	8%
Religiosity	Diffuse	7%
	Declared	8%
	Individual	10%
	Traditional	20%

posed mainly of persons lacking the potential to be influential. If the Republic of Moldova follows an upward development trend, we suppose that the share of such individuals will decrease in time. We cannot estimate what would happen if social and economic evolution hit a brick wall and the process was reversed, leading to many more individuals who could not be classified as well-off. This could eventually lead to a more influential conservative-religious agenda.

We also mention the fact that during the campaign for the Autumn 2016 presidential elections, several hierarchs of the Orthodox Church under the Russian Orthodox Church (Metropolitan of Chişinău and All Moldova, priests such as Ghenadie Valuţa or the bishop Marchel Mihăescu) manifested open endorsement of one of the candidates, encouraging their parish-

ioners to vote for him and underlining the importance of his religious affiliation, as well as the fact that he was baptised and married as an Orthodox. In the same electoral campaign, several news articles referenced the “sins” of another candidate after the LGBT community endorsed him.

All in all, the citizens of the Republic of Moldova **trust the Church but they do not want to see it getting involved in politics**. The political institutions have the lowest levels of trust they have ever had, while the religious institutions continue to be trusted by citizens. Participating in political activities continues to reach all time lows, while involvement in religious activities is much more frequent. However, most of the citizens reject the idea that priests provide recommendations for whom they should vote, and a majority disagrees with the possibility of having priests as political

candidates. Most of them believe that it is better that political functions be occupied by faithful people, but we have noticed a decreasing trend. A party that would take upon it the promotion of a conservative – religious agenda would alienate voters rather than allure them. The share of the individuals with a strong affinity for such an agenda is much lower than the share of individuals who reject such an agenda, and the persons who do endorse it are rather passive and less resourceful. If the Church decided to step further onto the political scene, this would most probably be an erroneous option, which would be far from advantageous. Furthermore, politicians' participation at religious events or the ostentatious display of faith are gestures that could do them more harm than good. In the end, this is a sign that, slowly but steadily, Moldovan democracy is becoming more mature.

V. How does Migration affect Citizens' Perceptions in the Republic of Moldova?

The Republic of Moldova is a state with net emigration, that is, the number of citizens leaving the country is larger than the number of individuals coming into the country. Although there are problems regarding the validity of the data about the number of citizens who left the country, we can use for estimation the statistics provided by the authorities. Since the data for the 2014 Census are not available, we will take into account the statistics published by the Statistical Data Bank administered by the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, as well as the 2004 Census data. Thus, according to these sources, 273,056 citizens had already left the country in 2004. Between 2004 and 2015 another 60,393 citizens emigrated, which leads to an estimation of 333,446 total emigrants (accounting for the margins of error), the equivalent of roughly 10% of the total population. According to the International Organization for Migration, however, in 2015 almost 18% of the citizens resided outside the Republic of Moldova¹¹, nearly twice the official figures from the national institutions.

Leaving aside the debate on the exact number of migrants, what is noteworthy is that a significant percentage of the population has left the country. Thus, we expect that their influence on the values and attitudes of the remaining citizens is significant. We are interested in emigration in this section. In general, emigration (either temporary or permanent) increases the level of tolerance of the migrants, especially when the destination countries are more tolerant than the origin ones. Thus, we assumed that the respondents who had left the Republic of Moldova at least once would have a more tolerant attitude. Under these circumstances, we will analyze the perceptions of gender roles and of matters pertaining to external politics (the relations with the European Union and/or with the Russian Federation), as indicators of measuring to what extent the opinions have been affected by migration.

¹¹ According to the country profile of the Republic of Moldova available here: [http://www. iom.int/countries/republic-moldova](http://www.iom.int/countries/republic-moldova) (accessed on 15.09.2016). Source: Database of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs of the United Nations.

CHART 35. HAVE YOU EVER LEFT THE COUNTRY AFTER 1991?

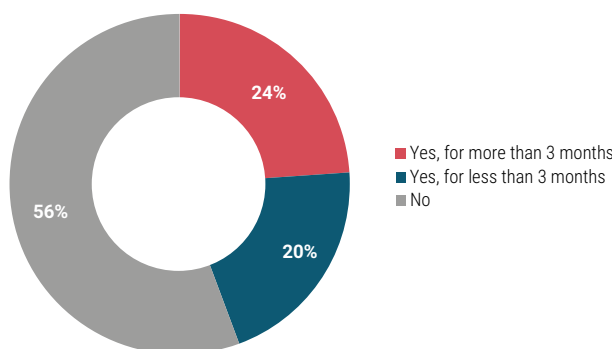


TABLE 10. RESPONDENTS' GENDER DISTRIBUTION AND MIGRATION EXPERIENCE

	With no migration experience	Indirect migration experience	Direct migration experience
Men	39%	36%	53%
Women	61%	64%	47%

Another important factor that we take into account is the indirect interaction of the citizens with other societies and other models of tolerance through the members of the migrants' households. Thus, even persons who have never left the country are bound to indirectly socialize to other cultural and social models through family members who have migrated. We will operationalize *migration-mediated exposure to different models of tolerance* as either the direct or indirect interaction with the migration experience. To these two categories we will add that of the respondents who have never left the country and do not have a family member who is a resident of another country.

44% of the respondents from the sample have been abroad at least once, and 24% of them spent at least 3 months abroad (for those who left the country several times, the longest period of time they stayed abroad was taken into consideration). 17% of the individuals from the sample had at least one family member who lived, worked or studied abroad¹² | CHART 35 |.

¹² We understand by a person residing abroad someone who has left for a minimum of 3 months for purposes other than tourism or as a member of an official delegation.

Before proceeding to analyze the way the migration experience impacts people's perceptions, we will briefly describe the profile of these categories. The gender distribution shows us that the women from the sample usually lack migration experience (61%) or have an indirect experience with emigration (64%). 53% of men from the sample have been abroad at least once, followed closely by 47% of women | TABLE 10 |. A potential explanation for the gender difference is that the former migrants in our sample had returned to the Republic of Moldova because of a not very successful migration experience. According to the literature (Vanore & Spiegel, 2015), this occurs more frequently with men, who lack the women's capacity to adapt to crisis situations¹³. This is an explanation that cannot be pursued in this study, given the objectives of the research, but it could constitute a future research subject in itself.

¹³ See Vanore, M., and Siegel, M., 2015, *The evolution of gendered migration trajectories from Moldova & Georgia*, available at <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40878-015-0001-z>

In regard to the economic situation of the three categories, we tried to determine it by analyzing personal income | CHART 36 | and the household income | CHART 37 | in order to assess the impact of migration on material well being. The major difference between the respondents with direct migration experience and those without such an experience is that a larger percentage of the former report the lowest or the highest personal incomes, whereas the latter usually have fewer than 3000 lei/month.

Analyzing the household incomes we can notice a significant difference between those who have no migration experience and the other two categories. While the share of those who reported no income is similar for the three categories, half of those with no migration experience reported household incomes under 3000 lei, in opposition to 36% of those from the other two categories.

We believe that a satisfactory explanation is that the households with higher incomes benefit from the remittances sent by migrant workers, and thus this category of citizens manages to get by with low personal incomes.

In what follows we will compare the three categories of respondents in regard to their tolerance for religious freedom, their attitude towards human rights and their support for conservative values. We operationalized the *conservative attitude* as those traits that endorse the following traditional values: 1) endorsing the public financing of the majority denomination; 2) endorsing mandatory religious classes in schools; 3) supporting the involvement of priests in politics; 4) rejecting abortion under all possible circumstances; 5) rejecting the rights of non-heterosexual persons; 6) rejecting "immoral politicians" (with morally faulty behaviors (according to the Orthodox teachings) – the homosexual, the divorced woman, the married man with a mistress, the atheist (For a descriptive analysis of these profiles see the chapter "Religion's influence in politics").

CHART 36. DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME FOR EACH CATEGORY

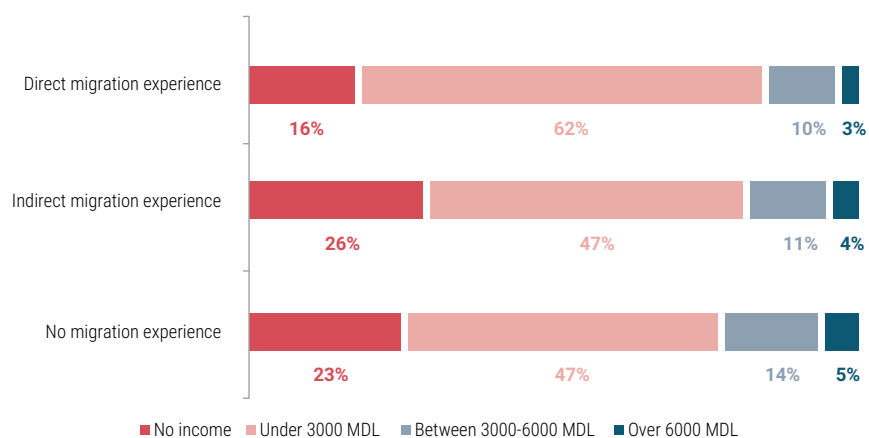


CHART 37. DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME FOR EACH CATEGORY

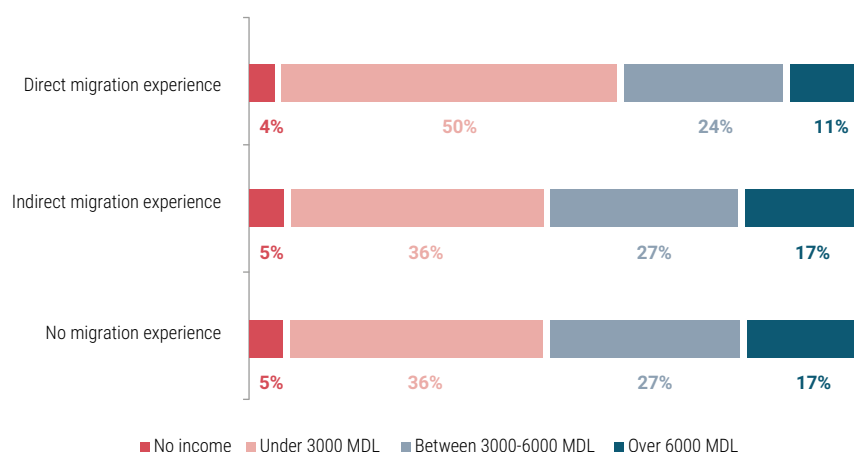
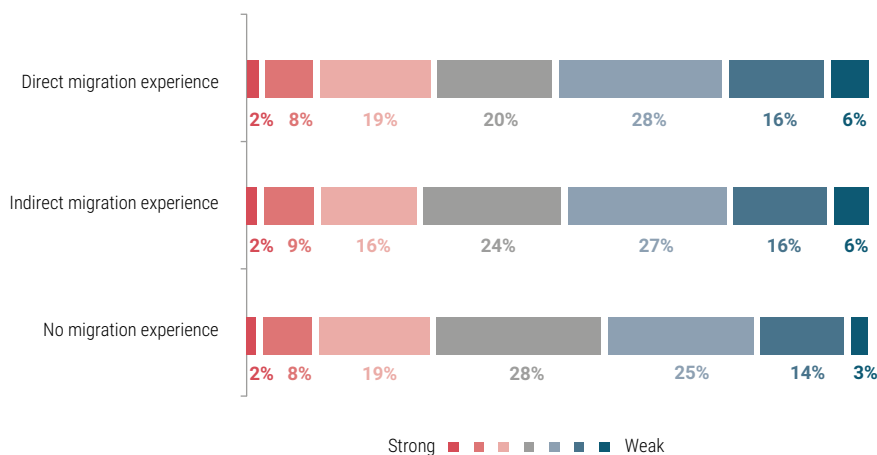


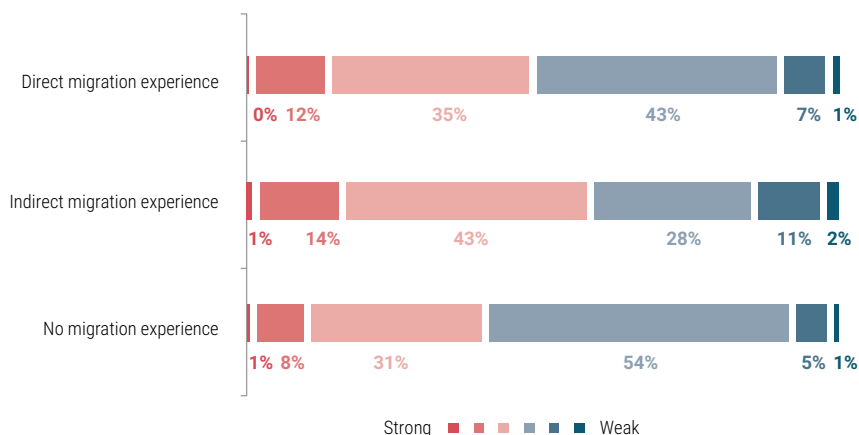
CHART 38. ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE CONSERVATIVE AGENDA ACCORDING TO RESPONDENTS WITH DIFFERENT MIGRATION EXPERIENCES (%)



Grouping the answers given to the questions about the conservative agenda we notice that the migration experience has little impact on tolerance and openness. This could be surprising at first sight, but it could be explained by the fact that most of the migrants choose as a destination country the Russian Federation¹⁴, and that 41% of the relatives of the respondents were in Russia at the time | CHART 38 |.

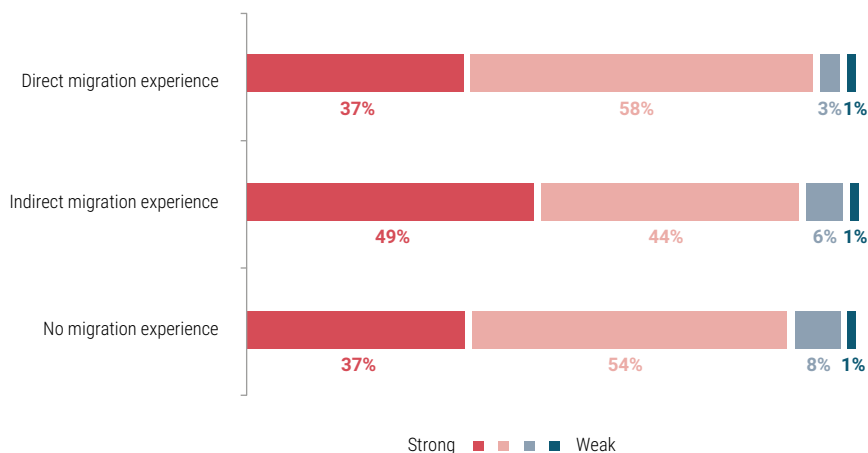
Taking these results into account, we decided to look at the perception of gender roles; focusing on what roles the respondents consider a woman should have outside the household and on how household duties are divided in the family. We built an indicator of the endorsement of equal gender roles division starting from the following themes: the professional advancement of women after they have children and the impact of having a job on children and on the family, how involved men are in raising children, women's financial independence, the capacity to take decisions in the family, the capacity to get involved in politics and business, and the importance of educational attainment for each of the sexes¹⁵. We split this indicator into 4 separate topics: 1) financial independence; 2) professional activity outside the household – especially after children are born; 3) women's participation in politics; 4) raising children and household organization.

CHART 39. ENDORSEMENT OF DIVIDING HOUSEHOLD DUTIES AND RAISING CHILDREN



We decided to analyze gender equality in this particular way because we believe it is more adequate for the particular characteristics of the Republic of Moldova than the traditional analysis that focuses on the woman's roles in only two spheres (household and public life) | CHART 39 |.

CHART 40. SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE



Analyzing the indicator according to migration experience, we notice that the most supported response is the financial independence of women (operationalized through her getting an income from her job). This is something supported by over 90% of the respondents from each category | CHART 40 |. A closer look reveals that the percentage of those who believe that it is important that women support themselves is similar to that of women

¹⁴ 69% in 2013, according to the Workforce Migration Report published by the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova.

¹⁵ This indicator was constructed based on questions E19-E31 of the questionnaire, which is available on the Soros Foundation-Moldova website.

who believe that the woman is the only one responsible for raising children and for taking care of the household duties. Defending women's financial independence thus does not seem to be motivated by a desire to liberate women from traditional roles, and we might be seeing the continued presence of a socialist-era feigned endorsement of women empowerment discourse. We notice that the most supportive of equal involvement in household duties are those with indirect migration experience (58%), followed by those with direct migration experience (47%); the percentage for those with no migration experience is only 40%. These data back the hypothesis that migration experience is important for a shift of perception regarding gender roles in the household. We encourage future studies to take a closer look at these dynamics.

In regard to those supportive of the woman's professional activity – especially after they have children – we notice that migration experience is important for the respondents' attitudes. Once again, those with indirect migration experience are the most open to this (41%), followed by those with direct migration experience (33%). Only 37% of those with no migration experience endorse women's professional activity | CHART 41 |.

Indirect migration experience seems to have the largest impact on increasing tolerance and openness to gender equality. One potential explanation could be the one briefly mentioned above, that our respondents were migrants who returned because they did not adapt to their host societies. Their return could have been caused by a conflict of values between them and the host society, which might have contributed to their coming back to the Republic of Moldova as a result of failing to adapt to the lifestyle in that country.

We have also analyzed the respondents' geopolitical options in order to see whether migration influences perception of international organizations such as the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union. The accession of the Republic of Moldova to these organizations has been heatedly debated for the last couple of years, and both of these represent important elements of political parties' programs.

CHART 41. SUPPORT OF WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY

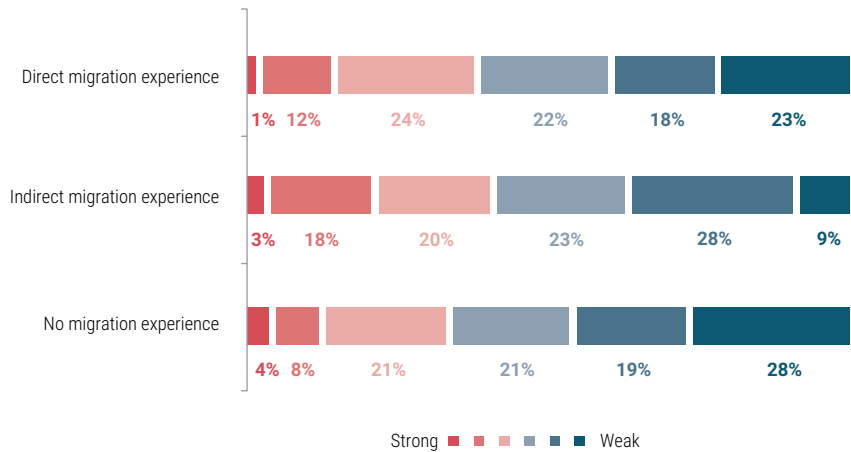


CHART 42. SUPPORT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

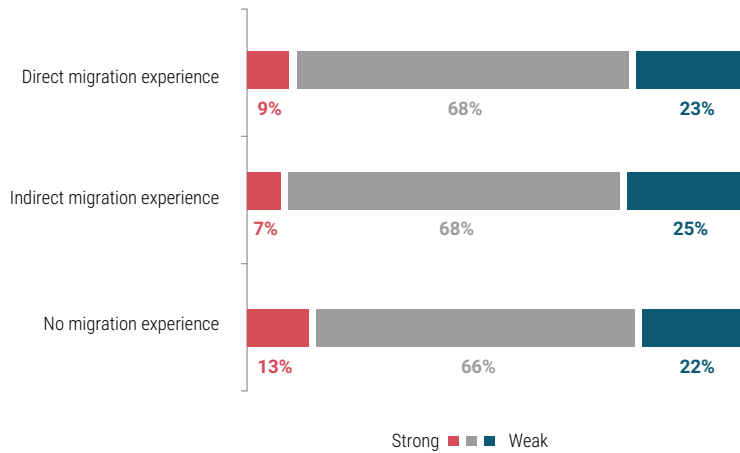


TABLE 11. SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

	European Union		Eurasian Economic Union	
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Favorable	Unfavorable
No migration experience	21%	79%	34%	66%
Direct experience	25%	75%	27%	73%
Indirect experience	24%	76%	28%	72%

We notice that the respondents who had never left the country at the time of research and who had no indirect migration experience manifested the most favorable attitude to the Eurasian Economic Union (34% of them) and the most unfavorable towards the European Union (79%) | TABLE 11 |. One of the explanations is that they have consumed more Russian mass media which promotes a more sympathetic attitude for the Russian-led organization.

In regard to the attitude of the respondents with either indirect or direct migration experience, the data show that they have similar attitudes to each of the two international organizations, being a little more favorable to the Eurasian Economic Union.

In order to better show the support for the Republic of Moldova joining one of these two organizations we build an indicator based on the answers to the following two questions: “Do you have a good or a bad opinion about the following international organizations?” “Do you believe that the Republic of Moldova should join one of the following international organizations?”

We notice that those with direct migration experience support more the Eurasian Union (73% of the respondents agree with such a potential membership). The explanation we put forward is that most of the respondents had previously been or worked in the Russian Federation, and thus felt closer to that country than to the states of the European Union. In regard to a potential membership in the European Union, the most supportive were the respondents who had members of their household working abroad. We believe that the remittances the migrants sent home and the possibility to visit them in their host countries contributed to a favorable attitude for that organization and for a potential admission to it.

In conclusion, we could say that emigration has a foremost economic and demographic impact, and it influences to a lesser degree mentality or social values. One of the explanations is that most of the migrants go to the Russian Federation, a rather conservative country. However, we advance as a potential explanation the hypothesis that the former migrants we had talked to were among the category of the “underdogs”, i.e., individuals with failed migration experiences, lower incomes and rather disposed to embrace conservative values.

CHART 43. FREQUENCY OF MASS MEDIA CONSUMPTION (NEWSPAPER, TELEVISION AND INTERNET) %

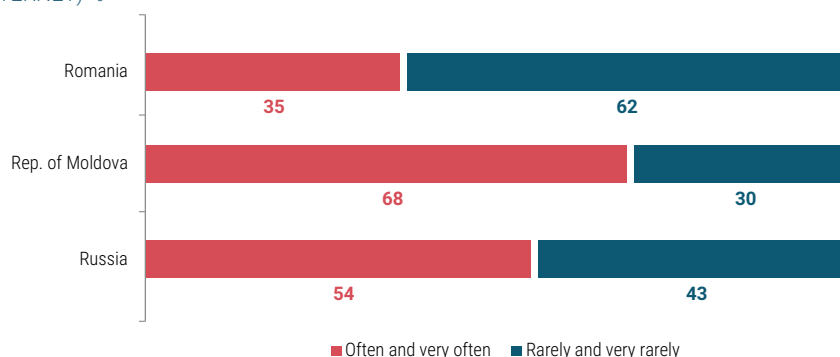


CHART 44. ENDORSE MOLDOVA JOINING THE EURASIAN ECONOMIC CUSTOMS UNION (% FOR EACH CATEGORY)

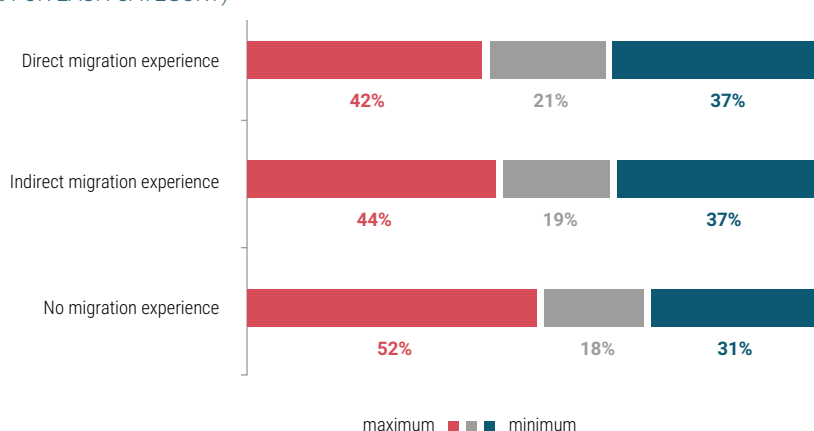
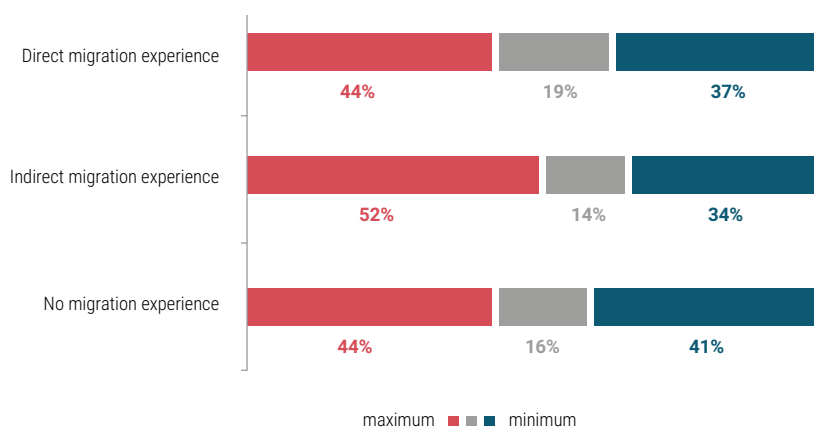


CHART 45. ENDORSING MOLDOVA JOINING THE EU (% FOR EACH CATEGORY)



4 Opinion Leaders' Attitudes and Perceptions

I. Introduction

This section of the report is based on qualitative data taken from interviews with opinion makers in 8 locations where surveys were implemented. In each of these locations (chosen to balance geographic, rural/urban and ethnic profiles) we interviewed a representative of the local administration (normally the mayor), a representative of the local school (normally the director), a representative of the local Orthodox church (normally the priest), and a representative of other religious denominations with more than 50 adherents. In total, there were 33 interviews.

Profile of the Respondents

Although not required by the design of the research instrument, our respondent base provides viewpoints from both men and women, with varying degrees of professional experience and age. Men are disproportionately represented among the opinion makers because all religious representatives were male. It is worth noting that the respondents overwhelmingly had superior studies; the greatest diversity in education level was among the religious representatives | [TABLE 12](#) |.

TABLE 12. THE NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS BASED ON SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CRITERIA

Criteria	Categories	Number of respondents
Age	25-34 years old	3
	35-44	13
	45-54	7
	Over 55	10
Gender	Women	10
	Men	23
Declared ethnicity	Moldovan/Romanian	27
	Ukrainian	1
	Russian	1
	Gagauz	4
Education level	Secondary education	4
	Higher education	36
	Post-graduate	11
	Not declared	1
Years in office	Less than 5 years	9
	5-9 years	8
	10-14 years	8
	Over 15 years	8

Receptions of Research

In general, respondents accepted the request to be interviewed with little hesitation. Some registered initial discomfort and uncertainty about their ability to respond accurately, but tended to relax as the interview progressed. Several questioned the need to audio record the interview, but only two refused.

In general, we accept our informants' answers as sincere and honest. We detected only one instance of misinformation – in this context relating to funds provided by the administration to the local Orthodox Church. Some (3) religious representatives appeared to answer our questions with reference to “the past” or how things “should be” and were reluctant to comment extensively on the present situation. Two others exhibited extreme discomfort with questions about the Metropolitan. Another four, from both minority and majority religions, sought the permission of superiors, consulted with other official religious representatives, or attempted to re-direct the interviewer to another official body before agreeing to the interview.

There was concern for how data might be used. In one locality, more than one member of the administrative staff made it clear that they had been dissatisfied with previous media coverage of the locality. Another informant refused to be interviewed until he was reassured that it was not a media reportage. And a third informant was reluctant to be recorded because his answers might be re-attached to other questions or used out of context (as is said to happen with media reports).

Organization of Research

Interview questions were tailored slightly for each of the three categories of opinion makers. Each group, however, was asked questions bearing on the perception of diversity; awareness of discrimination; understanding of human rights and the effects of their protection; practices bearing on the separation of Church and State, and on the State's even-handed treatment of religious organizations; the teaching of religion in schools; and role models (other states and political entities) for the Republic of Moldova.

Below we present a brief overview followed by several themes that emerged as important for each category of opinion

maker. We do not present an exhaustive analysis of each question; nor do we provide a statistical tally in most cases. Instead, we concentrate on identifying overall patterns of knowledge, interest, and concern.

A section on general conclusions and recommendations follows the presentation of public administration, teaching cadre, Orthodox religious representatives and minority religious representatives.

II. Overview

Perception of Diversity

We asked questions concerning the presence of ethnic, religious, political, economic, cultural and social diversity to each category of respondents. Interestingly, the question about economic diversity was understood primarily as referring to economic agents, rather than to the economic status of local inhabitants; social diversity was interpreted as individual economic status; and cultural diversity was understood as referring to organized activity groups and cultural events. Such trends in interpretation are important to note as they indicate that Moldova's opinion makers continue to perceive the population as relatively homogenous on all but ethnic and religious grounds, and some minor distinctions in wealth. Neither strong differences of class nor of “lifestyle” are noted, even in urban areas. This means that “diversity” and thus potential for “discrimination” are seen generally in a quite restricted scope, namely in terms of ethnicity (language) or religion.

Presence of NGOs

We asked questions of each category about the presence of NGOs as existing or potential collaborators for two reasons. First was to gauge a sense of the strength of “civil society” in local areas as a counterpart to the questions we asked about Church and State. In other words, what potential partners do religious organizations have other than public administration? The second reason was to discover if there were sources of information, support or activism for minorities in local communities. In general, none of the categories of respondents look to civil society organizations for support or partnership. Public administrators describe the existence of more NGOs in

the localities than the other respondents perceive; but, they also indicate that most such NGOs are formed only when there is the possibility to apply for or receive funding, and that such groups are project-specific. Minority religious groups are the exception, in that they tend to have a connection with at least one other organization, though that organization is typically based outside of the locality and may even be abroad. These connections are a source of grievance for Orthodox representatives, but they do not apparently seek their own connections with NGOs or charities in Moldova or abroad. One locality (4) reported more extensive collaborations with NGOs and charities than did the others; in this location, schools, religious organizations, and public administration were involved in several overlapping projects. The high level of activity seems to be the result of the social assistant's initiative.

III. Public Administration

Perception of Diversity

Of the four categories of respondents, only representatives of public administration reported diversity with positive or merely factual expressions. This was particularly visible in the reporting of religious diversity (which among other categories of respondent was described as “enough”, as if it were undesirable) and political diversity (which was often negatively viewed by other categories of respondent who would have preferred unity).

Rights and Human Rights

Fewer than half of the representatives of public administration volunteered a clear definition of Human Rights. Of these, the responses included the right to speech, to live how one likes, to do as one likes, to dress as one likes, and to have one's own “vision”; rights to education and health; to have the sense that one is protected; rights indifferent to color of skin, nationality, religion.

More than half insist that rights must be paired with obligations, and that people tend to forget these. Descriptions of obligations are, however, extremely vague: maintaining public order, not throwing garbage in another's yard.

Two of the respondents understand that human rights include rights for sexual minorities. One expresses support for the law, but says the population does not support it. The other expresses a “personal opinion” that it is not “normal” to guarantee rights to sexual minorities (specifically in the form of extending rights to adoption).

Perception of Discrimination

At least half of the representatives of public administration provide details of at least one kind of discrimination occurring in their locality in the recent past: gender, linguistic-ethnic slurs, inter-religious slurs and sometimes minor physical altercations, restricted access to school and public resources by handicapped children, and physical access to buildings (even medical facilities). All of them, however, declare that there are “no” categories of people who face discrimination in their locality.

The denial of discrimination is explained in relative terms: either the discrimination is not violent, or it has improved, or it has not been officially registered with the police. In some cases, the example given is of a potential form of discrimination (e.g. in education) that has been resolved.

Church and State

Support for religious organizations. There is a nearly unanimous desire for public administration to support religious organizations. This is normally understood as referring to the Orthodox Church, but representatives also understand that the law requires them to not discriminate. Direct support for religious organizations is reported as small-scale: food for the annual Hram celebration (Patron Saint's Day) at the Orthodox Church, free space and electricity for events hosted by other denominations, preparation of paperwork (for building projects, grant applications, etc.), use of machinery.

The potential for discrimination remains, as mentioned more extensively by representatives of minority religions, in the allocation of land for building projects and in financial support. The vehicle for these forms of support is the local council. Representatives of public administrations in two cases mention that substantial sums of money for church repair works and building of Orthodox churches had

been authorized by the local council. One participant verifies this possibility by explaining that the city council cannot make such discretionary awards (nor do they have the money), but that they are always looking for ways to do so; one possibility may be in identifying Orthodox churches as “city buildings”.

Volunteer work. Another form of support that is provided to the Orthodox Church consists in sending employees of the administration to perform work at the church. This occurs in times of repair works, and in times of preparation for celebrations. There is no discussion about the terms of this volunteer labor (e.g. whether workers must take time off, whether they receive pay, or whether it is truly voluntary). Such labor is not described as being offered to (or requested from) minority religious organizations.

Display of religious symbols. The display of (Orthodox) religious symbols and blessing of offices in the public administration is not considered problematic. The choice to display an icon is considered a personal choice of the office worker. The presence of icons in the vehicles of public administration is unilaterally denied. Representatives acknowledge that the office building was blessed when it was first constructed; only one acknowledges that the offices are blessed annually. He has his office blessed, but says that all the other workers decide for themselves. There are no reports of conflict over icons, as there were in a few of the schools.

Cemeteries. Conflicts over the use of cemeteries have been reported in previous studies of the situation of religious and human rights in Moldova. In each of the 8 localities where our research was conducted, such conflicts were said to have never existed or to have been resolved. The common solution is for public administration to retain responsibility for the cemetery, and for an Orthodox plot to be distinguished from the others. In some locations, cleaning and maintaining the cemetery is undertaken as a joint collaboration between all religious denominations on specifically announced days. Nevertheless, potential for “disagreements” remains – for example, when an Orthodox priest attempts to bless the graves of non-Orthodox. Such incidences are not reported or registered as conflicts, and are said to be “resolved” in the moment.

Public events. The responses from public administrators suggest that the inclusion of religious organizations in public events is haphazard, but so far unproblematic. In this respect, events planned by public administration differ from those planned by the schools. Religious minorities are not invited to the installation of new monuments, although Orthodox priests are invited to bless them. There seems to be no recollection of what happens at commemorative events in the localities. There is awareness, however, of the need to not discriminate. On the question of Hram, one respondent reported a strict distinction between the program planned by the administration (non-religious) and that planned by the Church. Two others reported that they deliberately involve the other confessions in the non-religious program, specifically with sports.

Church's Engagement in Law Development

Representatives of public administration reflected carefully on our question about whether the Orthodox Church should have the privilege of consulting on laws before their introduction. They understood that such a consultation would require a specific mechanism and that such a mechanism would interfere with the strict separation of Church and State. Even if such separation is never perfect, these respondents express general support for the principle. Separation does not preclude the possibility that Church and State would work “in the same direction”. Some express the opinion that the Church (and other religious organizations) can express its opinion through the voices of its members as citizens. Such a perspective is not at all unanimous: one of them voices support for the Church's consultation on religious laws, and another one thinks the Church should be consulted generally because of the population's Orthodox identity and because people have greater belief in the Church than in Parliament or politicians.

IV. Schools

The responses of school representatives are important ones. Of the four categories of opinion makers, school representatives were the most confident about their knowledge of rights. Yet their other responses betray an extremely mixed un-

derstanding of (or support for) the same topic. Similarly, though they (like others) report that there is no discrimination in the locality, their responses reflect a much wider understanding of practices that might constitute discrimination than do the other categories of interviewees.

In general, it can be said that the school representatives would prefer a less diverse community, united around common traditions, religious beliefs, and politics. They are strong supporters of “public order”. At the same time, both their own descriptions and those of minority religious leaders indicate that school representatives go to great lengths to accommodate diversity when it presents; they would rather work together than remain in conflict.

Perception of Diversity

School representatives were the most negative in their assessments of existing forms of diversity: one of them even described religious diversity as “abnormal” and unfortunate. In contrast to public administrators who were relatively politic on the question of diversity, some school directors were frank in expressing a preference for Orthodoxy. Political diversity was similarly problematic for them, but at least, said one representative, no one was a “fanatic” about his political beliefs.

Rights and Human Rights

School representatives are confident in their knowledge of rights. They also believe that schoolchildren are well instructed in their rights and in procedures for protecting themselves against abuse and discrimination; some mention publicly posted information in school buildings. In at least one case, the local police have provided instruction to students.

Only two representatives provided more than 2 examples of a “human right”;¹⁶ and no one right was mentioned by more than two individuals. The rights mentioned twice were the rights to life, a name, and health. Other human rights given were those to: rest, work, employment; private

life (specifically sexual orientation); to not vote; to education; to the religion of one’s choice; to opinion; social protection; and food for children.

Like public administrators, school representatives emphasized the important pairing of rights with obligations. Descriptions of “obligations”, however, were similarly unclear. Breach of obligations is visible when someone fails to consider the impact of his exercise of “rights” on others (as possibly infringing others’ rights). One of them referred back to the “right to work”, noting that one has an obligation to look for work, especially if one claims unemployment benefits. Another one claimed that minority religions that do not vote do not uphold their obligations to the state.

Those who know that rights are guaranteed by Moldova’s Constitution do not see the need for Human Rights to be guaranteed separately. Others give the opinion that it would be good to guarantee “some rights”, so long as they would really be enforced, respected, and that people would be “protected”. Guaranteeing rights is seen as possibly leading to “anarchy”, though not necessarily immorality. The solution proposed is that discussion of “rights” should be accompanied by discussion of “obligations”.

Laws and Legal Protection

School representatives are more outspoken than representatives of other groups in criticizing the state’s failure to uphold and apply its laws. This criticism runs throughout the interviews. It makes its first appearance, as noted above, in abstract questions about rights. It continues in the specific discussion of whether students know how to protect themselves from discrimination or to seek justice when their rights are abused. It also appears in responses to questions about role models for Moldova (see below).

As mentioned above, school representatives are confident that students know their rights. But, they see substantial evidence that children’s rights are not protected in practice. One interviewee was most explicit in this discussion.

Another one of them comments that students are unlikely to use what they know because they rarely have the courage to denounce someone; they right-

ly fear backlash. Nor do they have role models among adults in pursuing legal avenues of justice. Victims of domestic abuse are often returned to the families that victimized them. The police refuse to intervene in reported cases of public sexual harassment. And even this school director admits that she encountered so much anger from a girl’s father and general public opinion when she had followed legal procedures in dealing with a female student, that she herself concluded that the legal procedures (while correct) were not a good way to proceed in the locality.

Perception of Discrimination

Perception of discrimination is mixed. As with rights, school representatives are confident they know what “discrimination” means. The examples, given, however, indicate that there is not a common understanding. One participant provides examples of discrimination in: access to school; when one person is allocated housing but another is not; and discrimination by medical professionals in dispensing treatment. The grounds of discrimination are not made clear. In the opinion of the principal, Roma may be denied services if they do not have a “normal” behaviour; the principal finds it reasonable that Roma should be punished for their unacceptable behavior, and that such punishment should not be called “discrimination”. In the case of homosexuality, in particular, “discrimination” is understood as physical violence. One participant describes an atmosphere of frequent verbal conflicts between ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Moldovans, but denies that this is “conflict” or that discrimination on ethnic grounds is present.

Claims of discrimination are often considered bids for special treatment (e.g. when Roma claim that their children are receiving marks lower than they merit). And, it is not uncommon to point to groups that merit privilege (e.g. gifted children) who do not receive extra support (in contrast to those, like mentally handicapped children, who do receive extra support).

Role Models for Moldova

Questions about potential role models for Moldova inspired relatively little interest among most interviewees. Religious representatives were cautious in their answers (see below), while public admin-

¹⁶ For all the research instruments, when analyzing responses to questions about “human rights”, we accepted the informants’ definitions. We did not sort out “correct” or “incorrect” responses with recourse to any formal or legal definitions.

istrators tended to avoid the question with diplomatic responses that something could be learned from each country and/or that no country could serve as a full model, and that Moldova would need to develop its own path. School representatives, however, responded to such questions as yet another opportunity to comment on the importance of law, public order, moral role models in government, and the importance of low unemployment to public order. Specific points mentioned included the need for clearly posted public regulations; consistent and impartial enforcement; and the impartiality of the police.

The countries mentioned were exclusively Western European countries: Germany, UK, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Spain, Austria, Holland, Denmark. Russia is never considered a good role model on account of its high levels of corruption.

Religion in School

The experiences reported in the sample localities are diverse. Some report that religion is offered in school on an optional basis, and that there have been no complaints among parents or students. Others report that religion is not offered, although it has been offered in the past. There is general support for the subject to be offered as an optional course. There are at least two cases in which Orthodox and minority religious courses have been offered in an apparently conflict-free arrangement.

School directors claim responsibility for introducing or cancelling the subject. There is no indication from the interviewees that parents or students have solicited the course, although some religious representatives describe gathering signatures to petition for the course.

Another case is illustrative of local conflict and resolution. This is described not in terms of the law, but as "living well" with everyone, and not "ruining relations". In the capacity of school director, one participant attempted to offer religious instruction from the Orthodox priest. Representatives of 13 religious minorities appeared in his office together to argue against this approach, and he ceded. On another occasion, the priest arrived to sanctify the school and its classrooms (something "normal" thought the principal), but children of the minority religions hid under their

desks to avoid being sprinkled with holy water. These episodes have convinced the principal not to offer religious instruction (not even optionally) or (until things have calmed down) to allow the sanctification of the school. Even where religious minorities have not objected to teaching religion, a director may have chosen not to introduce the subject; this occurs even when the director is strongly in favor of Orthodoxy. The objections of only a few parents may be enough to convince a director not to offer courses in religion.

A common solution to accommodate children whose parents do not want them to study religion is to place the course at the end of the day. Non-participants go home early, while the others remain. In some cases, this solution is seen as impractical because the children who should remain will be so hungry that none of them will want to stay.

Opinions also vary on who should teach religion, and how it should be taught. Some favor the course being taught by a priest (as in most cases occurs), but there is concern that priests may not know how to "work with children" and should have additional pedagogical training.

Among school representatives, opinions about how the subject should be taught are also more diverse than in other groups. In this group, there are voices for the subject to be taught "as a science" with no component of "prayer", sometimes even in opposition to the director's own professed beliefs. The preference for the subject to be taught as a science may be motivated by a desire to avoid conflict. Incorporating information about religion into courses on history and civics is also considered a reasonable approach. Nevertheless, the subject of religion is seen as valuable for its capacity to draw students to religious practice, as well as "educație" and "cultură" (lit. education and culture, but encompassing the meaning of moral behavior). Another interviewee reports the same effects from the teaching of religion by a minority representative.

Religion in Education

There is other evidence that school directors are under pressure to navigate the place of religion in education. One principal explicitly says that the teaching cadre continuously discusses the matter of teaching religion in school, and that it

is always necessary to come to a decision "somewhere in the middle".

In some schools, it has been necessary to stop the annual practice of blessing the schoolrooms. In others, this practice continues, but it has been necessary to remove most icons and religious symbols.

Schools also encounter problems related to religious diversity in the organization of extracurricular activities, celebrations, and festivals. The children of some religious minorities do not participate in activities involving performance (singing, dancing, masking). In other cases, they do not join in the celebration of religious holidays (e.g. Easter). Interviews with the representatives of minority religions indicate that this has been a topic of much discussion, and that it has evolved so that many children of minority religions do participate, provided that the content of the program is not in direct contradiction with religious beliefs (see section V below). To the extent that activities are organized outside of the locality (e.g. district-level festivals), it is harder for schools and minorities to find a common solution.

There are numerous points of contact between School and Church which might be perceived as discrimination. For example, one participant notes that students help clean the Orthodox Church in preparation for Hram (non-Orthodox students do not help); the Orthodox priest (and even higher officials) are invited to school celebrations (1 September, Last Bell), but minority religious leaders are not invited; the Orthodox Church may help organize some school festivities. Individual teachers may encourage students to pray, specifically to icons in the classroom (for health, good studying). One principal presents an example in which the teaching cadre support the display of religious symbols, even if they practice different religions; some parents have complained, but the conflict remains subdued and the teachers explain to students that there is no discrimination about whether or not they believe. Annual sanctification of the school and classrooms remains common; in other cases, it is undertaken only in times of re-building.

Religion and State

Despite their general support for law and public order, school officials generally had

little comment on actual or desirable relations between religious organizations and the state. Some could not imagine how the Church would influence law (particularly in the case of reviewing laws), because of separation between Church and State. In some cases, the desirability of this separation was enforced; the Church, it was said, should remain a spiritual haven and a force for connecting people in different social situations (rich and poor). Therefore, in political and economic concerns, the Church should not be involved.

Support for the separation of Church and State was by no means consistent. Some who expressed this view were also strong supporters of religious education in school. In contrast, one of the voices against teaching religion in school voiced a strong opinion that a “collaboration” between Church and State was desirable in the domain of law-making: nothing bad could come from keeping the 10 Commandments in view.

In short, all supported some influence and involvement of the Church because of its moral authority, but they thought the Church needed to preserve its spiritual purity. There was no coherent vision, not even for individuals, in the balance of these relations.

Tendencies

Among school officials, it can be said that there is strong support for increasing familiarization with religion as such. It is seen as normal that religion should be Orthodoxy; there is general support for the Church (as an institution) to be present and active in the locality. The Church (and its Priest) is usually considered a “good partner”, and Orthodox traditions are considered unproblematic unless minorities object to them.

Orthodoxy apparently appeals to school officials because of its promise of moral education. Religion is expected to offer something “beautiful for the soul”. Moreover, the promise of moral-religious education, whether undertaken in church or school, appeals because school officials want an orderly society. They want laws to be upheld and for people to behave with concern for others. They want an end to the corruption that they see as endemic in contemporary society. When faced with demands from non-Orthodox individuals or organizations to be includ-

ed, school officials tend to be accommodating, as long as they can continue to fit the minority religions into their view of what religion should offer in terms of moral guidance.

V. Orthodox Representatives

Rights and Human Rights

Orthodox representatives described rights both in normative (legal) terms and with reference to rights offered by God. Normative understandings included the rights to life, work, rest, education, and medical treatment. Rights offered by God included those of belief and choice of confession and are sometimes equated with “Free Will”.

Throughout the text of the interviews, there is evidence that at least some Orthodox representatives know the language of Human Rights well enough to express their own “rights” (as individuals and as Church representatives) in terms of rights to privacy/private life, free conscience (if not freedom of conscience), rights of children, etc. In this respect, their engagement with the topic of rights is more sophisticated than that of either public administration or school representatives. Indeed, at least three of the Church Representatives were engaged with legal cases.

Representatives of the Orthodox Church are careful to endorse legal protection of rights. Some say that State protection is not necessary because God has already granted such rights. There are multiple cautions that the State should “think” before guaranteeing rights, both for their practical ramifications in lawsuits and requirements of the state, and for possible contradictions with Orthodox Christianity. There are cautions that the Church will not support sins as “rights”.

As among other categories of respondents, Orthodox Representatives emphasize that people have “obligations” in addition to “rights”. These remain, as elsewhere, poorly explained, but include military service and blood donations (i.e. “obligations” to the state that some minority religious groups have negotiated, see below).

Although Orthodox representatives are careful to distinguish the kinds of “rights”

that are acceptable to the Church, there is little evidence from these interviews that Church representatives in Moldova adhere strictly to the “alternative” discourse on Human Rights being developed by the Russian Orthodox Church (or indeed by other world Churches). In these interviews, for example, the theme of “human dignity” never appeared and the discussion of “free will” was quite subdued. The right to work is mentioned, but in a normative sense, as it is mentioned by other categories of interviewees. “Harmony” is critically assessed by one respondent and restricted to a consideration of laws and Church teachings by another.

Perception of Religious Rights and Discrimination

Several priests assert “their rights” against those of religious minorities, but it is not usually clear what they mean. Only one seems to provide an example: this is a priest who was taken to court for inciting violence against proselytizers who appeared in his village on a religious holiday. He won the case, but he does not explain the grounds for the decision. Throughout his interview, Rights to Privacy and Belief are frequent themes.

Importantly, respondents expressed the sense that it was the Orthodox Church that the State discriminates against. Only one respondent provided a clear explanation of this position: despite the Church’s Soviet-era persecution and its role as traditional religion, it has been placed in a position of “equality” vis-à-vis other denominations. Minority religions were suspected of benefiting from the financial support of the State or outside organizations to which the Orthodox Church had no access. None of the respondents acknowledged that most minority religious groups in the localities were present during the Soviet period and equally, if not more greatly, subject to state persecution.

Morality: Public and Private

In the interviews with school representatives, themes of public order and moral education were prominent, although not often elaborated. School representatives expressed the desire for an orderly country (with laws applied consistently and impartially) and considered the moral education of children (specifically through

religious education) as an important component for ensuring the country's future improvement. On the whole, school representatives did not express the opinion that the guaranteeing of Human Rights would endanger this process. On the contrary, it was important to them that the State uphold all of its laws; just as it was important that citizens uphold their own obligations to the State.

In contrast, Orthodox Representatives provided a view of Rights in which the guaranteeing of rights could endanger public morality. It should be noted that none of the representatives makes such a simple equation; only one admits that "problems" could emerge from the guarantee of some laws. But most of the interviewees do comment that guaranteeing the rights of sexual minorities goes "against nature" because homosexuality is a vice. They are concerned, too, that guaranteeing Rights produces "too much liberty" with regards to public expressions of sexuality, and that children are being prematurely exposed to information about sex and sexuality. It should be noted that at least two of the representatives were at pains to be diplomatic in their responses, especially one, who repeatedly expressed his personal discomfort rather than a religious perspective.

Homosexual relations are implicitly equated with smoking and the consumption of alcohol. Smoking and alcohol are both dangerous to health, and the state regulates their sale and consumption in the interest of public health. The implication is that sexuality should be similarly regulated by the state.

Inter-religious Relations

Most information about inter-religious relations in Moldova emphasizes tensions and conflicts. In our interviews, we therefore asked questions about the possibilities for collaboration with other religious organizations.

In some cases, collaborations are reported as active in the locality. These are of three types, all largely informal: 1) personal relations between the leaders of congregations; 2) support in money and labor of better-off members of the locality to denominations other than their own; 3) co-participation in charitable activities, though rarely through joint initiative. When not already present, collaboration

in the "social domain" (e.g. charitable works) is considered possible.

There is some willingness to collaborate with other religious organizations in spiritual activities, of whom Catholics are the most likely, but the belief systems of most denominations are considered too different and canon law is said to prevent Orthodox from "praying with heretics".

Only one respondent saw the possibility for common political action, for example in the opposition to abortion.

Differences between the Bessarabian and Moldavian Patriarchates may be ascribed to "personal" politics and to politics more generally, both in the initial dispute over the Bessarabian, and in ongoing developments where more than one of the patriarchates are present. Otherwise, exchange between the two churches; mutual visits to monasteries and churches, communication between priests, etc. is not affected. These opinions outweigh those expressed by one participant who maintained that "families have been divided" by the existence of the two churches. Though representatives tend to express a preference for a single church (two Orthodox churches are "abnormal"), they do not express preference for one over the other. Instead, they see the presence of two as political manipulation by both Romania and Russia.

Lack of "Respect" by Minorities

Orthodox representatives do not like some of the approaches of minority confessions. For example, there are frequent disparaging remarks about religious representatives who "go through streets," "knock on doors," and stop people on the street to hold "religious debates". The preference of the Orthodox representatives is that people should come to the building (of any confession). There is also a tendency to see religious minorities as "proud" (not greeting the Orthodox priest) and as "discriminating" against the Orthodox in the sense of pointing out the Church's failings (without acknowledging their own).

There is suspicion that minority religions are "pyramid schemes", and some frustration that they seem better able to respond financially to the population than is the Orthodox Church, possibly because they were "funded". Also suspicion that

minority religions are "organized" and "have a plan" (for conversion). One informant offered a detailed description of minority religions as concerned with proselytisation and conversion, both of which are not upheld by Orthodox. He describes a variety of conversion practices (e.g. driving cars to service to display wealth, asking people encountered on the road if they will come to service, children playing outside during their lessons at school). He also objects to the use of public space by minorities to host events.

As with the "obligations" that minority religions have to the state and the degree to which their children participate in extra-curricular activities, practices of proselytization appear to have been modified in the past several years by minority religions in the locality (see section on minority religious representatives, below). The depictions of Orthodox priests should be suspected therefore as outdated stereotypes.

Role Models for Moldova

When asked about role models for Moldova, Orthodox representatives responded directly to the relation between Church and State. Germany was cited three times, though on one it was the functioning of laws that was most admired rather than the laws themselves. Otherwise, representatives looked to other post-socialist Orthodox church-state relations: Russia, as well as Romania and Bulgaria. Byzantium was considered the best model for "harmony". Significantly, Greece (with its much longer experience of navigating [European] Human Rights issues) was not mentioned. None of the Orthodox models were accepted in whole. Respondents were particularly careful to qualify that what they admire about Russia are the limitations it places on minority religions. "Modern" Russia was seen as more problematic than Tsarist Russia as a model.

Religion in School

Orthodox representatives rarely denied the possibility of teaching other religions because, they said, Orthodoxy (as Christianity) is a "tolerant" religion. Even the one representative who said that it would be impossible to teach multiple religions, signaled the willingness of the Orthodox: he blamed minority religions for their lack

of interest. Still, they assume that Orthodoxy should be the primary point of reference, and that the teaching of other religions should help to deepen understanding of Orthodoxy.

There is widespread agreement that the person who teaches religion should be a “specialist”: in some cases this means that priests should have additional pedagogical training akin to that undergone by teachers; in others it means thorough theological knowledge (including history of Churches, etc.). Regardless of the specific credentials to be held, Orthodox leaders indicate a preference for a priest to do the teaching.

Orthodox representatives recognize discriminatory practices within the educational setting, but they see the problems as stemming from the minority religious groups themselves, or as being the lesser of problems. For example, they know that some children do not participate in school or district festivals. They see this as a choice (rather than discrimination per se), and a bad one because it prevents children from “giving back” to the school. Similarly, the non-participation of minority children in funeral rites for teachers is seen as preventing them from showing respect.

Religion and State

Orthodox representatives approach public administration for financial assistance on some occasions (e.g. for repairs). They report that such assistance is rarely provided (because of various laws), but that it would be “welcome”. Beyond the locality, the State makes money from the Church from tourism to monasteries, but fails to protect other churches. One representative offered a coherent view of the State’s failure to provide funding for buildings and repair as part of post-Soviet restitution.

Although public administration is barred from giving money to the Church, local public administration and individual administrators may be sympathetic to the Church. One participant, for example, mentions an attempt by the local council to donate the proceeds from selling a kindergarten (in which the Church had held services in the absence of a physical church) to the Church. A commission from Chisinau investigated and declared the arrangement illegal.

Though they receive nothing from the State and may be even discriminated by it, Orthodox representatives feel that the Church is “called” by public administration to bless state buildings and schools, and to participate in public events. “Of course”, they do this. Between the sets of interviews, it is clear interactions between public administration and the Church, as well as between Church and School, may be initiated by either side.

Concerning the relation between Church and State at a more abstract level, Orthodox representatives may distance themselves from “politics”, claiming that their role is to “unite” people rather than to “divide” them.

In general, a division between Church and State is upheld. One participant says that they are each “different structures in the moral plan”; the State is concerned with the material, and the Church with the spiritual. Even if the Church sometimes is concerned with the material, the two structures should not be united. Nevertheless, full separation is not realistic because even if it is declared (as in USSR), some of the people in government will be believers, and then what is in their heart will be manifest.

There is disagreement about the desirability of a special role for the Church. Most representatives accept the status quo, but there is one strong voice on either side. One participant strongly upholds separation because if priests received salaries they would be subject to “certain pressures”. In contrast, another expresses the opinion that if Church and State were not separate, then the State would have to provide the much desired financial support for Church buildings, perhaps through a system of grants.

Administration of Cemeteries

In the localities where interviews were conducted, there were small-scale conflicts concerning cemeteries and burial practices in the past, and some still emerge. All Orthodox representatives (and their counterparts in minority religious organizations and public administration) considered the problems to be resolved and resolvable at the local level. All cemeteries had been divided into separate plots for the Orthodox and non-Orthodox. In at least two cases, the Orthodox Church had attempted to administer

the cemetery in the past, but all remained under public administration specifically to resolve problems that might emerge between the denominations. Potential for conflict remains in cases of burying family members of different religions in a common plot, but the two representatives who mentioned it took opposite positions: one of them considered that it was a problem to bury a non-Orthodox with an Orthodox, but the other one thought it was okay to make an exception and to combine funeral and memorial rites.

Public Events

No collaboration or co-presence in the activities of Hram are reported between the Orthodox Churches and other denominations. We phrased our question in the commonly used phrase of “Hramul Satului” (Village Day) to draw out the public nature of the event; however, as Orthodox representatives noted, the celebration hinges on the Orthodox Church in the locality and venerates a saint. Therefore, other denominations do not sponsor activities or participate in the Church’s activities on the day. One participant notes that the young people of minority religions come into the center, but then return home. Public administration provided additional qualifications for how minorities are sometimes incorporated into the public events (see above).

The two Orthodox churches do appear sometimes at common events in urban areas where both are present. Sometimes by invitation; other times because the church should be “alongside people” and does not need to wait for an invitation. Some participants distinguish between invitations they receive from “public administration” (which appear to coincide with Party leadership/political orientation of the Church) and those they receive from individuals active in public administration.

Activities organized by the school (e.g. 1 June) may draw leaders from multiple religious organizations with no problems.

Correspondence of Law and Religion

More than half of the Orthodox respondents were in favor of the Church being consulted in some form on laws prior to

their introduction, and no one spoke out against the practice. There were several modifications on the theme. One of them provided the mildest view, which was that the state should “think” about whether law represents what people value. (When pressed, he specified that he was referring to the law on sexual minorities, which he sees as not representing the population’s values). Consultation between the state and the highest levels of the Church was considered “normal”, and entirely keeping with Europe’s Christian heritage. One representative limited this consultation to laws related to the moral sphere (including school). Two Orthodox representatives from a common locality, were alone in considering that registered religious minorities should also be consulted.

Tendencies

Orthodox representatives may accept a high degree of separation between Church and State as normal, but they want state “support” (mostly in financial terms) and they want the Church’s view on public morality to have an influence on public policies and laws. They are convinced (and rightfully so on the question of sexual minorities) that they represent majority values.

Tolerance may similarly appear both normal and “Orthodox”/“Christian” to them, to such a degree that they may (as individuals) be willing to tolerate, accept, and interact with people of other backgrounds, including homosexuals, without discrimination. It is important to note that, as with school representatives, “discrimination” is frequently understood as individually-directed physical punishment. But they are unanimous in declaring that “vices”, however common and inherent to humans, cannot be condoned: neither smoking nor deviant sexual practices.

Even positive descriptions of tolerance are accompanied by a firm conviction in the priority of the Orthodox Church over all other religious denominations. Other denominations are seen as “new” in Moldova, even when they were established in a locality prior to the Soviet period. Other religious organizations are seen as approaching people to “bring them in”; such deliberate efforts at proselytization and conversion are seen as antithetical to what a “real” religion should do. They imply that such organizations would be

more tolerable if they built their prayer houses, offered regular service and ritual, and waited for people to come to them. This is how Orthodox representatives see themselves as behaving. Indeed, although some note that they ask school directors each year if they should sanctify the school, they more commonly describe themselves as waiting for invitations, not only to sanctify buildings but also for other forms of public participation.

Orthodox representatives also feel that they have been disadvantaged by laws that allow other religious organizations. The particular complaints focused on the foreign financial support which such organizations receive; the Orthodox Church, they say, can receive no financial support from abroad.

Orthodox representatives present fewer examples of a conciliatory approach to conflicts that arise over different perspectives than do school officials. Nevertheless, the potential to openness remains. In particular, discussion of common values in a locality tends to stress the foundations for inter-communication and respect.

VI. Representatives of Religious Minorities

It should be noted that our interviews were conducted with representatives of religious minorities having over 50 members in a locality. This means that we have the “voice” of the major minorities. We do not have views from smaller minorities. Importantly, this means that we do not have opinions from minorities that have been established in recent years (the congregations of our informants date to the Soviet period). We also do not have the voices of any groups that do not consider themselves “Christian”. This is an important omission, all the more so because of a) the presence of a small Jewish community (that used to be proportionately larger) in one locality where interviews were conducted; b) the expressed intolerance towards Islam voiced by some respondents in each of our interview categories; c) the occasionally mentioned positive inclinations towards Buddhism and other “oriental religions” (which are considered harmless). The experience of Muslims will be addressed in the section of the report detailing Focus Group discussions.

Perception of Diversity

Representatives of minority religions report local diversity (in neutral terms) in nearly all forms. They are more likely than the other three categories of opinion makers to comment on social diversity, particularly the presence of poor and needy families.

Rights and Human Rights

The representatives of religious minorities assume that “Human Rights” are congruent with their religious beliefs. Specifically, they assert that the “right to choose” or “free choice” is the same as “free will”; God intended for people to have such rights. While freedom of religion is uppermost in their concerns, they describe a broad range of rights which they are willing to support according to their religious beliefs: human rights have to do with respecting someone as a “person” in community organizations, school, and work. A person should be respected as a person, valued for his work; it is important to guarantee such rights because God is in everyone. Human rights consist of rights to not be maltreated and to have “possibilities” to live as one likes.

Such statements are largely self-referential, however. The representatives who address the laws on sexual minorities are as disapproving as their Orthodox counterparts. One representative also expresses uncertainty about the “rights of children”, because of concern (shared but not as strongly explained by informants in other categories) that parents may have lost their rights to discipline. One participant speaks explicitly in favor of corporal punishment; other interviewees spoke only of “discipline” and “education”.

Further rights mentioned, by only one respondent, are those to a pension and private life.

Obligations

Representatives of minority religions do not combine their discussion of rights with one of obligations. However, in the course of the interviews, several responded to the accusations that appeared in other interview categories that religious minorities do not fulfill their obligations to the state. In other interviews, religious minorities were said to: not participate in

extracurricular school activities; to not donate blood; to not perform military service; to not vote.

Minority representatives voluntarily addressed these accusations. They say, they do perform alternative service to the state in exchange for military service; children do learn to sing and participate in school festivities if the content does not contradict religious teachings (e.g. no Communist content, no pagan/satanic content), and the determination of acceptable content is left to parents. Blood transfusion is also left to individual discretion.

Nevertheless, the representatives of two groups confirmed many of the accusations as true for their group, although others from the same religion explained that these were “choices” rather than requirements of the religion.

Discrimination: Registration and Building

Representatives of religious minorities report persistent problems with registration and building. They faced equal if not stronger persecution as the Orthodox in the Soviet period; such restrictions drove them to meet in each others' houses. In recent years, efforts to obtain land and permission to build were hampered in several cases, usually by council members – specifically Orthodox priests -- rather than public administration per se¹⁷. One solution was to rent space from public administration or private individuals, but private individuals might be pressured to change the agreement. At present, all interviewees reported having their own building or being in a process of building. Discrimination faces others, they say, if an Orthodox priest sits on a local council. There were no claims for state support, restitution, or funds for building like those advanced by Orthodox representatives.

¹⁷In this case we noted participants' answers, but we had no possibility to check whether the described situation – Orthodox Priests elected as members of the Local Council – is true. It would be an important point to look into because council members are elected to their positions.

Relations with Orthodox

Religious minorities express both commonality with and difference from the Orthodox. The Jehovah's Witnesses find common ground in belief in Christianity and God, but claim that many of the Orthodox teachings are mistaken/pagan (including both dates for Christmas). Baptists and Evangelicals accept Orthodox teachings, but distinguish the Orthodox concern for “traditions” from their own concern for “living beliefs” in a way that changes a person. One respondent expresses tolerance even of “oriental religions” because they do not harm people.

Collaboration in the social domain (esp. charitable works) is widely recognized as possible and even desirable. Spiritual collaboration is considered unlikely, and yet there is at least one respondent who sometimes conducts burial rites with his Orthodox colleague. Intermarriages between minorities and Orthodox occur. Two others report strong interfaith relations.

If the overall sample can be seen as positively inclined towards interfaith relations and collaborations, with some respondents actively engaged with Orthodox and other counterparts, there are still two representatives who speak of the preference for their community to “keep to itself”.

Morality

The representatives of minority religions are not diplomatic in their assessment of the effect of human rights on morality. Three respondents spoke directly against guaranteeing the rights of homosexuals; two of which noted that the behavior is immoral and against God's law. One explicitly describes homosexuality as a kind of immorality that is prominent in Europe, and that Moldova is being pressured to accept by Europe. Another speaks against guaranteeing the rights of people “of low moral standard”.

Discrimination

Reports of discrimination against the religious minorities in the localities are mixed. About half report good or improving relations within the community, other denominations, and public adminis-

tration. Improvement means a decline in aggressive encounters, or that “misunderstandings” between people are “minor” (looking at people askance, throwing garbage in someone's yard) even if frequent. Two others describe continuous harassment. In one case, it is verbal slurs, children throwing shoes, being followed by vehicles full of people, etc. in rural locations; in the other case, it has to do with medical treatment. To some extent, the lack of discrimination is relative: better than it was before 1940, when one might be exiled.

One participant says that Jehovah's Witnesses do not want to receive blood transfusions but this does not mean that they want to die; it would seem that some medical personnel refuse them any treatment, whether from a severely misinformed attempt to respect their beliefs or as deliberate discrimination, it is not clear.

Two representatives call attention to the willingness of other opinion makers to not discriminate against them. Another one makes a distinction between the “good relations” that his congregation has with public administration. He says that if there were no law guaranteeing the rights of his congregation to be active, he thinks that the administrators would not provide it because, as people, they do not approve. In contrast to public administrators, teachers are described as “understanding”; if a parent approaches a teacher and explains how the child is “educated”, there are rarely problems for the teacher to make adjustments.

Role Models for Moldova

In general, representatives of the minority religions hesitate to identify another country as a good model for Moldova. A few possibilities are mentioned from popular knowledge or experience – the U.S. on account of laws restricting noisy parties (e.g. weddings) after a certain hour; or Holland on account of good people. There is, instead, a more pronounced sense than among other opinion makers that Moldova can be its own example. When pressed, neither Romania, Russia, nor the EU appear to be particularly good models. Russia in particular presents a problem because of its stricter laws on the registration of religious organizations.

Religion in School

Several of the representatives teach religion in school. Sunday School classes are offered at the minority churches, but in some localities it is "practical" for one person to introduce the subject to all the (minority) children.

Like Orthodox representatives, minority representatives emphasize that something of belief should be transmitted. Almost all say that they would accept a common curriculum with the Orthodox if "traditions" were not emphasized. Their preference is for instruction in religious teachings, and for a specific focus on the Bible. The two Jehovah's Witnesses disagree over whether they could accept a common curriculum with the Orthodox focused on the Bible. Only one representative would accept the teachings of non-Christian religions. On the whole, however, they do not think that such a curriculum is likely, and therefore prefer that the courses remain optional.

Representatives of religious minorities do not express an objection to the display of icons in school buildings, nor in the buildings of public administration. Nor do they object to the sanctification of the school building. One expresses lack of knowledge about the presence of icons or practices of sanctification, but thinks they cannot hurt and might do some good. Another one describes an alternative form of sanctification, with prayer but no use of Holy Water, that he performed in the school after it was built.

Religion and State

Despite discrimination from public administration when attempting to build their prayer houses and lingering suspicion of the potential for such discrimination, minority representatives report good relations with public administration in other domains. In particular, public administration is reported as providing valuable small-scale assistance to support public events sponsored by the churches, such as the concerts and family days organized at Culture Houses and stadiums, and the periodic preparation of documents for projects, grants, etc. To some degree, public administration's "support" for the minority events is suggested as comparable to the support given to the Orthodox Church at Hram; the grants mentioned often benefitted the whole lo-

cality or social groups (e.g. impoverished families) that public administration wanted to help too.

Minority religions also report a number of charitable initiatives when they consult with public administration to identify needy individuals/families to provide various forms of charity. Sometimes public administration approaches the minority religions for help in social assistance or contributing voluntary labor to the upkeep of public space (parks, cemeteries).

All of the minority representatives support a strong separation between State and Church; some recognize historical problems from their fusion and the incompleteness of any formal separation. Some think that the religious views of individual citizens and political figures should influence decision-making.

Tendencies

There are perhaps three main tendencies to note from the representatives of minority religions. First, is that with certain exceptions (specifically related to building rights and public presence outside of their own locality), representatives of minority religions seem to indicate that discrimination against them has been much reduced, and is at levels which they are willing to ignore.

Second, is that they present themselves as being extremely willing to cooperate with an Orthodox majority population. They report good relations and actual or potential collaborations with local public administrations, Orthodox Churches/priests, and most other "Christian" religious groups. With few exceptions, the content of extracurricular activities, festivities, and even religion courses in school seem to have been modified to levels which allow most minority children to participate and opting-out is acceptable and well-structured. They ignore, or find acceptable, other symbols of Orthodoxy in public places. Jehovah's Witnesses alone are clear in their preference to not "have relations" with other religious communities or to participate in "inter-confessional activities". Yet they too are involved in charitable activities, and at least some groups allow their members significant "choice" in participating in public life, education, etc.

Third, and perhaps surprisingly, is that minority representatives are thoroughly conservative. Although they have benefited from the State's guarantee of human rights, they are willing to deny such rights to others. Indeed, their concept of human rights is even more restricted by religious interpretations than that volunteered by Orthodox representatives. Similarly, they express similar desires for the laws to reflect the population's Christian values and are less hostile to the possibility of the Orthodox Church consulting on laws than might be expected.

VII. Conclusions

Polarization

The results of the qualitative interviews reveal similar forms of polarization as to those suggested by the quantitative surveys: In each category of opinion makers, we found a majority of individuals holding a solidly conservative perspective. We also found 1 or 2 individuals who, if not "liberal" in their opinions were nevertheless well-versed in the themes of human and religious rights, with a good understanding of law and its normative application. At the same time, we also found in each category 1-2 individuals with more "extreme" conservative opinions, favoring the religious rights of the Orthodox majority (or holding equally extreme positions on the correctness of a minority religion) to the logical exclusion of all others.

Most informants, however, indicated a position somewhere in the middle. They supported a conservative version of the status quo; they had incomplete and vague understandings of key principles and how they might be applied; and they were partial towards the expression of their own religious beliefs in the public sphere. But, such individuals also manifest a sincere desire to avoid overt conflict.

Homosexuality

Only one of our 33 respondents (a minority religious representative) reported personal knowledge of the existence of a sexual minority in the locality. The view that such a person would not be discriminated against if he/she did exist was universal. Jokes and rumors were

acknowledged as common but not considered discrimination; discrimination in this case was understood as consisting of physical violence directed at the individual person. There was absolutely no support for guaranteeing the rights of sexual minorities. Even the respondents who indicated the clearest understanding of the law claimed that such legal protection was not “normal”. The respondent who did know of the existence of homosexuals indicated that it was important “to pray for them”.

In the case of sexual minorities, legal protection was understood as “promotion” of behaviors/identities that were sinful or constituted an illness; moreover, such protection was seen as dangerous to the public order because it could “attract” others to the same illness/sin; it was dangerous to children (by providing too much information about sex, in itself a sin); and it was disturbing to the peace of mind and privacy of others.

Unimaginable Forms of Gender and Sexual Minority

Sexual minorities were understood only as referring to homosexuals, and more specifically to male-male couplings (who were given as examples of potential adopters of children). Other possible minorities (e.g. bisexual, transgender, etc.) were never mentioned, and apparently never imagined as existing in the local setting.

A Locked Debate

Public opinion on homosexuality (to say nothing of the other forms of gender and sexual minority) is locked on two fronts. First, is that there was no indication that any informant imagined that there were other possible avenues for approaching the “rights” issue beyond the parameters of sinful and unnatural behavior. Within such parameters, the definition of “family” is tightly locked to procreation, and does not consider any of the myriad laws or social practices related to “family life” through which sexual minorities may face discrimination.

Public opinion is locked on a second front because no one is willing to learn what actual grievances might exist. They do not want to see public evidence of the existence of sexual minorities. Some opinion makers are also learning to argue that

they have “rights” not to be exposed to evidence that such minorities are present in their midst.

Obligations

The need to balance obligations against rights was an important theme for many respondents, and particularly for those in public administration and schools. Description of “obligations”, however, rarely expanded beyond a general reference to the requirement to observe the rights of others; be “cultured” (not litter); or participate as an active citizen (voting, military service). What is not clear from any of the interviews is whether our respondents think that the guarantee of human rights is dependent on an individual’s observation of such vague obligations. It is not clear whether they think that a person’s tendency to litter, for example, would be grounds to deny the protection of his basic rights. Nevertheless, the emphasis on obligations indicates that opinion makers tend to see rights as conditional rather than fundamental, and that they can be convinced relatively easily that some people, whether as individuals or groups, do not deserve their due rights.

Levels of Legal Protection

We can conclude that there is general support from opinion makers in the argument that rights should be guaranteed, and human rights inclusively. This is understood as fundamental to democracy (specifically free speech) on the one hand; and fundamental to God’s will on the other (free will, free choice). There is, however, little expressed understanding of why more than one legal instrument might be necessary or desirable (e.g. why new laws from the EU if the Constitution exists?).

Discrimination and Privilege

With notable exceptions, we found that the concept of rights blurs quickly with that of privilege; and the concept of discrimination blurs quickly with that of physical violence or punishment. Public administrators may be careful to distinguish “registered” complaints of discrimination or conflict from those that are ubiquitous in everyday life but not registered. In this way, they may know that they are deliberate in ignoring the

presence of discrimination in their midst. For the other categories of respondents, such lack of clarity would seem to represent a more genuine misunderstanding of the wide range of behaviors and practices that can “discriminate” against an individual or group, preventing their full participation in public life and/or exercise of guaranteed rights. There is little sense that individuals or groups who demand their rights (especially through legal channels) are doing something other than “complaining” or seeking an unfair advantage over others.

Common Values

Our questions about common values that united people in the localities produced two sets of answers. On the one hand, several respondents understood the question as one about “common concerns”; from this perspective, they pointed to the material challenges of life in contemporary Moldova, especially for families with children. Such answers were particularly common among, although not exclusive to, representatives of public administration and minority religions. On the other hand, the question was understood as one about shared values. Sometimes the two understandings overlapped, as in responses about “family” or in comments on the level of “envy”. Otherwise, the list of shared values was rather extensive: common mentality; personal modesty and lack of invidiousness; traditional values; traditional customs; religiosity. References to modesty, tradition, and religion normally reference Orthodoxy; sometimes these are specified as referring only to “Fear of God”; and most often are open potentially to all Christian denominations.

State vs. Locality

The interviews with school representatives, in particular, draw attention to what might be described as the ample “good faith efforts” among local opinion makers to be “even-handed” in addressing real and potential conflicts between religious and other rights. In contrast, they provide evidence that higher-levels of governance (district and national) fall short of making similar efforts: the organization of festivals in the educational system are discriminatory; state officials fail to certify disabilities; and state officials give religious items as presents to schools.

Aversion to Conflict, Willingness to Compromise

A strong theme that emerges from interviews with opinion makers is that they are self-conscious of a deep aversion to conflict. Such an aversion, along with the positively-described local values of “respect”, “understanding”, and “listening” (plus additional Christian and Orthodox values of “modesty” and “tolerance”), seems to contribute to a strong willingness to compromise and to accommodate people with other beliefs and practices. Examples of such accommodation indicate that it is rarely proactive, but occurs as a response to an outspoken grievance. Yet it is worth noting that speaking-out itself may be discouraged. Representatives of the Orthodox Church, in particular, provide ample evidence that it is the “outspoken” and publicly visible elements of the minority religions which are most distasteful to them.

Best Practices?

These interviews contain evidence of multiple practical solutions that have been undertaken in localities as opinion makers and citizens attempt to balance the rights of various groups and individuals in accordance with the law. These include: the offering of multiple courses on religion; the cancelling of all religious courses in school and the instating of Sunday Schools in all the churches; divisions of cemeteries into confessional plots with exceptions for mixed-denomination families; alterations in the content of school activities and festival programs to be inclusive of religious minorities; the posting of “no religious solicitation signs” to deter proselytizers (instead of beating them); adjusted practices by proselytizers themselves to avoid “disturbing” people who do not want to talk to them; etc. It remains to be seen whether such accommodations are satisfactory.

Advocacy and Litigation

Interviews with opinion makers indicate that litigation is being pursued against individual representatives of the Orthodox Church. Other categories of opinion makers appear not subject to litigation. In general, knowledge about the procedures for litigation is said to be widespread, but equally rarely undertaken. According to school representatives, public opinion is so conflict-averse that even people with strong legal claims are likely to be shamed and harassed from so many corners that they are dissuaded from pursuing their case. At the local level, there is little trust that the police will pursue justice as they should; rather, it is suspected that the police will look for ways to “blame the victim” to avoid following through with the casework.

Support for advocacy or litigation at the local level would seem to be extremely limited to passive and individualized forms. Schools have informational billboards; some police are proactive in providing training sessions to students; and some public administrators know the law well. There are no NGOs reported in the localities where interviews were collected that have a legal profile; nor are there reported contacts or collaborations with such NGOs outside of the localities.

5

Focus groups

I. Introduction

In addition to the opinion survey and interviews with opinion makers, we conducted eight focus groups. Seven of the focus groups were organized according to religious affiliation:

- 3 groups of Orthodox Christians;
- 3 groups of mixed Christian minority religions;
- 1 group of Muslims;
- the eighth group was conducted with young people (ages 18-30).

The groups were also formed according to rural and urban/semi-urban areas. The youth group was overwhelmingly urban, and the Muslim group was entirely so. In the six groups formed around Christian religious affiliation, respondents were mixed in age, gender, and educational and professional profile.

An overview of the results of the focus group discussions are presented below according to the type of group. The perspectives of the Christian Minority and Orthodox groups are presented in more detail than the Muslim and Youth groups. This is because many of the perspectives brought forth by the Muslim and Youth groups agree with that presented by the other groups. Thus, we use the space allocated to the final two groups to draw attention to the major points of difference.

II. Christian Minority Religions

Rights and Human Rights

One of the groups could be described as confident in its knowledge and interest in the protection of rights and human rights. They describe rights as being meant to protect people (specifically individuals) when situations are “uncertain”; and they provide a wide range of examples: life, work, study, free speech, medical assistance, liberty, equality, justice. They are, moreover, interested in knowing what avenues exist to protect rights; when the moderator asks if they have made use of an NGO, several ask if such NGOs in fact exist.

The other two groups manifest much less familiarity with the topic. Their examples cover a similarly wide range of rights: freedom of opinion, health, education, free movement, religion, family, work, to vote. However, their expectations concerning rights and protection are significantly different. They interpret “rights” either as obligations of the state to provide for its citizens, or as “privileges” that only some individuals/institutions demand/receive. Thus they complain that the state “guarantees” rights to work, life, education, circulation and health but fails to provide adequate work, salaries, pensions, roads, or medical services. And they complain

that the Orthodox want more rights than others (and seem to be getting them). They do not see rights as being meant to prevent “discrimination”.

Significantly, the term “obligation” does not appear as a counterpart to “rights”, as in the interviews with opinion makers. The absence of the term is particularly notable too in comparison with the focus groups formed around other principles; in several of those teacher participants put forth the concept of obligations. Teachers were also present in the minority religions’ focus groups, but they did not bring up “obligations”.

Discrimination and Conflict

The focus groups provide an important corrective to the interviews conducted with opinion makers in describing local situations of discrimination and conflict. They confirm the general consensus of the interview results that many conflicts between the Orthodox and minority churches and between minority churches and schools have been resolved. Problems are not reported with cemeteries, with the teaching of religion in school, or with children’s participation in extra-curricular activities and festivals. Participants in the focus groups confirm that public administrators are following the law, and are even pro-active in finding common solutions:

in one case, Hram is being re-configured as "Sărbătoarea Satului" (Celebration of the Village) with deliberate widening of the program of public activities; in another, the rights of minorities to use public space were championed over a petition against their non-use (the complaint had been about possible noise, and the mayor backed the minority pastor in reminding the Orthodox that the minorities might equally sign a petition requesting that they not ring the church bell).

At the same time, the focus groups provide ample evidence that discrimination is rampant. Members describe themselves as constantly subjected to verbal harassment (not "just words" as described by public opinion makers); they describe how their religious affiliation is used to discount them as individuals, to belittle their opinions and contributions, and to intimidate them. Most indicate that such verbal harassment comes from relative strangers (more distant neighbors and acquaintances), but say that work relations are generally good. Some note that they are excluded from common activities, often celebrations, with work colleagues (presumably because they do not drink).

Focus group members also identified a number of other situations in which others (not only religious minorities) face habitual discrimination. In contrast to opinion makers, they note that Roma (Gypsies) face problems if they "expect" anything, for example to be treated as equal to non-Roma. The disabled are seen to be discriminated against. There is widespread condemnation of the personnel in both educational and medical institutions for taking bribes and for assessing a person's socio-economic status as a pre-condition for treatment.

Frequent linguistic discrimination and verbal harassment for linguistic competency/choice remains a painful experience for both Russian speakers and Romanian speakers.

Religious discrimination, it should be noted, was sometimes "accepted" as an inherent component of being religious. According to the Bible, it is to be expected.

Conflicting Rights: Law vs. Morality

At several points during each session, moderators called attention to the possibility that rights could come into conflict, and asked the focus group to consider which right (or party) should have priority, and/or how the conflict could be resolved. In general, this was a difficult exercise for the groups. They tended not to prioritize rights; instead, they saw them as a set, in which all were equally important. Sometimes they chose "life" as the most important right, arguing that it was the precondition for all the others; sometimes they chose "religion" on account of their own religious identity. Moderators therefore provided examples from some of the most contentious social issues: Health vs. Choice (immunization, blood donations/transfusions); Life vs. Choice (abortion); Sexual Identity vs. Religion (legalization of homosexuality).

When provided with specific examples, the groups always responded by upholding the law but distinguishing a correct moral choice. In other words, no one suggested that abortion should be illegal; and the consensus supported the administration of vaccines and the acceptability of blood transfers. Abortion, however, was generally considered immoral, and a choice that no woman should make. The moral choice in health domains was less clear, but also of less interest to members.

Sexual and Gender Minorities

The focus groups also provide an important corrective to the interviews with opinion makers on the question of sexual minorities. In contrast to opinion makers who reduced the category to exclusively address homosexuality (particularly male-male), the members of these focus groups exhibited much wider knowledge of such minorities. The focus groups discussed: "ambigen"/"Strigoi" (as people born with both male and female sex organs); transgender people (as people not wanting to be what they were born); homosexuals; lesbians; sexual predators and pedophiles. What is important to note is that few individuals were clear that these were distinct categories of people. Most seemed to need to try very hard to discuss the rights of homosexuals, without blurring the homosexual (or lesbian) with the fearful (and even self-loathing) "strigoi" of 19th century villages or with contemporary pedophiles. In each group,

there were initial voices that such individuals should be killed; such opinions were always quickly negated. The discussions that followed focused on whether and how such a "disease" could be treated; some individuals suggested surgical remedies, but the most confident voices asserted that the cause was psychological rather than physical. The discussions ended in general consensus that such individuals should be "loved" in accordance with Biblical teachings, but should be encouraged to give up the sin.

The focus groups provide evidence that both violent feelings and tangible fear are aroused in people when they are asked to think about sexual minorities.

Interestingly, the focus groups did not discuss the legal status of sexual minorities at any length, even when the moderator provided opportunities for the group to pursue such a discussion. There were only two instances when attention was focused on the dimension of legal rights.

State, Politics and Religion

The focus groups held the general view that Church and State should be separate, but that this separation does not quite exist in Moldova because of the Orthodox Church's privileged place (and determination to increase its privilege). There was little will to contest this situation openly; many commented that the situation remained preferable to that in Romania. (Russia was not mentioned). Moreover, memories of inter-war discrimination by Romania against religious minorities remain vivid.

Similarly, they were against Churches having political influence as institutions. Some consultation on laws could be desirable, if all the registered religions were consulted. There was a concrete suggestion that consultation could be undertaken in the format of a roundtable with leaders of each of the religious groups. In general, there was greater support for religious individuals to put their beliefs into voting practices or to stand for election as individuals. But, many found it impossible to imagine that a truly religious person would actually be involved in political decision-making because politics is "dirty".

Religion and Law

The groups responded to the themes of state, politics, and law in connection to religion in very similar ways. As indicated above, they tended to accept laws but to distinguish moral choices and behaviors for those laws that are in contradiction to their religious beliefs. Relatedly, they expressed no desire to make new laws that would conform to religious teachings, although, as noted above, they also expressed the desirability of some legal consultation.

Interestingly, though politics is considered “dirty”, Moldova’s laws are regarded in a favorable light. As with opinion makers, the focus groups complained that laws are not enforced, but the laws themselves are considered “good”. One individual consistently drew attention to the importance of the laws; he noted specifically in the case of Muslims that the state “does a good thing” by guaranteeing their rights, because it requires the two religions to deal with each other on peaceable terms.

Most strikingly, few individuals thought that they could be in accord with their religious beliefs and make recourse to the law when they faced individual or group discrimination or harassment. A few individuals in each group disagreed strongly with such a perspective, arguing that the law itself, along with the police and other security services are meant to provide “support” for people. Overall, the focus groups provide evidence that many adherents of religious minorities consider that because they believe in “forgiveness”, they should not avail themselves of legal protection, complaint, and litigation.

III. Orthodox Christians

It should be noted from the outset that compared to the Christian minorities, the members of the Orthodox Christian groups were not as consistent in presenting their opinions as those of a “religious” person. They did make reference to the Bible, 10 Commandments, Holy Scripture, etc. but it was clear that these were not their only important reference points.

Rights and Human Rights

The three focus groups comprised of Orthodox Christians exhibited an equal familiarity with the range of rights and human rights as recorded by the religious minorities above. There were two notable differences, however, in the discussions of the Orthodox groups. One difference is that the theme of “obligations” did emerge among the Orthodox groups; in two groups, teachers led the discussion with precisely this theme. As in the interviews with opinion makers, these teachers also did not explain what obligations consist; nor did their fellow group members expand the theme. One teacher’s description made clear that the relationship of obligations-rights is central to the curriculum in Civic Education.

The second difference is that some members of the Orthodox groups did prioritize rights. They privileged life, education and health above several others, on the grounds that these rights guaranteed life and were therefore more important. Some also clearly disfavored the right to freedom of religion as less important than others.

Freedom of Religions

Religious rights proved a difficult theme for the Orthodox groups. Some considered religious rights “fundamental” but still agreed with other group members that guaranteeing such rights opened the door to a diversity that was undesirable at best, and potentially dangerous at worst.

They dislike that minority Christian groups exist in Moldova because it means that people changed their religion. This strikes a majority of the participants as wrong, even if they recognize that by baptizing children as babies they enable Orthodox Christians to know little about their own religion and to not behave in accord with Orthodox morals. They also strongly dislike proselytization; some enough to be in favor of stripping Jehovah’s Witnesses of their legal status (and thus of rights). Some find that they can only be friends with people of other Christian religions if they “do not talk about religion”.

On the other hand, Christian minorities are largely, at this point, tolerated (and occasionally admired). There is much greater concern voiced in these groups about the status of Muslims. While many members of the groups indicate that they know Islam can be a religion of peace, they are worried that in legalizing Islam and Muslim organizations Moldova will fall victim to “fanatics”. (There is general concern voiced about whether the process of legalization is able to control for “religions” that are harmful, such as Satanism). A very few strong voices also expressed the opinion that Moldova was too tolerant; these individuals accepted the presence of Muslims in Moldova, but thought that Moldova’s laws should not, for example, allow Muslim women to be veiled in public. The logic put forth was that Christian women going to Muslim countries must veil; therefore, Muslim women coming to Christian countries should not veil. “Freedom of Religion” from this perspective is also considered an important right, but one that should not be granted in ways that are too permissive or too tolerant, lest Christian countries become overrun by non-Christians.

Discrimination and Conflict

The three Orthodox groups mentioned similar categories of people who face discrimination and similar domains of discrimination: Roma, the poor (or poorly presented), ethnic minorities, and both Russian and Romanian speakers; in work, education, and health. They acknowledged little discrimination on religious grounds of either Christian minorities or of themselves as Orthodox. They did acknowledge Muslim personal acquaintances who had experienced discrimination.

Conflicting Rights: Law vs. Morality

On all themes related to conflicts between rights, the Orthodox groups were more muted than the minority Christians. However, they too expressed little desire to change existing laws to bring them into greater conformity with their religious beliefs; thus, they saw no real “conflict” between rights, only moral choices. They too were against abortion, but allowed greater possibility that a family might not be able to afford an unplanned child and/or that medical grounds would be important considerations.

Sexual and Gender Minorities

The Orthodox groups did not dwell long on the subject of sexual minorities. Their opinion was closer to that of opinion makers: they limited the category of sexual and gender minorities to homosexuals; professed that they did not know such individuals; and concluded that homosexuality (or at least cohabitation, which they considered the same as “marriage”) was something “new” in Moldova, introduced from other places. It is hard to know whether a similar range of confusions, fears, and violence would have emerged in a longer discussion. No one opined that the laws that have been adopted should be repealed. Instead, a few people noted (as one did in the minority groups) that the Orthodox feel discriminated against when homosexuals hold parades and public events, but they do not make equal use of their own rights to publicly present their own values. There was mixed support for the protests that had been made against the guaranteeing of rights for gender and sexual minorities; there was approval of the public display of Orthodox values, but disapproval of the level of violence and hatred that the protest leaders attempted to provoke.

State, Politics, Religion and Law

The Orthodox focus groups manifest a similar range of opinions on the influence that religion should have on politics and law. That is to say, they upheld a separation between Church and State, and did not argue that the Orthodox Church should have a special relationship with the State. In general, they supported religious freedom, and did not seek to restrict the registration of other religions with a few exceptions considered especially dangerous to society (like Satanists). They had mixed views about the desirability of religious political candidates and of political advice from a priest. Some thought it could not be “a bad thing”, but even some who held this view joined other group members in considering that a truly religious person was unlikely to be involved in politics; and, that a priest should concentrate on spiritual advice. They criticized priests who “go to parliament” as being nothing other than lazy, self-interested, former Communists. Views on parliament holding consultations with the Church over proposed laws were also mixed. Few opposed the possi-

bility outright, but those who supported it tended to restrict the process to laws that directly concerned the Church or other religious organizations. While they would have preferred only a consultation with the Orthodox Church, there was widespread agreement that this would constitute religious discrimination, and considered that consultation should be taken with all registered religious groups. It is notable that the groups seemed to conceive of such consultation as occasional events (akin to the roundtable solution proposed in one minority group), rather than a standing relationship of consultation. As in the minority groups, it was also considered reasonable to rely on normal voting procedures through which all citizens (including priests but not excluding others) could express their views on proposed laws according to their religious views.

The Orthodox groups were not opposed to engaging with the law on religious grounds (as were the Christian minorities), but they considered it a generally ineffective option. They brought forth the same reasons mentioned by the Christian minorities: specifically, lawyers cost money that people don't have, and the state-provided lawyers are ineffective because you don't pay them. One participant knew of and had sought advice from two different legal NGOs! None of the participants considered seeking legal advice from a priest (unlike the Christian minorities, some of whom pursued exactly such an approach).

Two Metropolitans

The focus groups were unanimous in seeing the presence of two metropolitans as unproblematic from the level of religious practice and belief. There were mixed views about the overall influence of the two Orthodox Churches. In general, the presence of two Churches is seen as stemming from a political contest because of political maneuvers and manipulations. As such, they were inherently “negative”, but only some people thought that the political maneuvering (and negative influence) was continuing.

IV. Muslims

Rights and Human Rights

The Muslim group's discussion of rights was distinct in the degree of importance assigned to freedom of religion. This right was considered especially important because they felt that without its explicit guarantee, and without the registration of Islam and specific Muslim organization, they were vulnerable as religious persons. Muslim respondents, particularly the men, were among the best informed about the intent and function of laws concerning human rights. One makes an extraordinary distinction concerning his own (personal and religious) disapproval of homosexuality against his support for their rights.

Discrimination

Members of the group were at pains to describe generally good social relations (see below). However, they also provided significant evidence that Muslims face a range of discriminatory practices that is probably broader than that faced by the Christian minority religions. Veiled Muslim women are subject to verbal harassment by both men and women and sometimes to unwanted physical touching by non-Muslim women (who try to remove their veils). Muslims also experience discrimination in work and housing, with a number of examples being provided to suggest that it is common for apartments to not be rented to Muslims and for otherwise qualified Muslims to not be hired solely on account of religion. Private enterprises with a “public” interface (e.g. banks) as well as public institutions (schools) seem particularly unwilling to hire Muslim women who veil. Employers are also reported as unwilling to accommodate religious holiday time (they require work on Saturday) or to provide appropriate space for daily prayers. As did Christian minorities, Muslims who have work report good relations with colleagues. In rural areas, women who convert to Islam are especially vulnerable to public harassment and often lose the support of their closest family members. The men described numerous cases in which Muslim children had been harassed by classmates or teachers, and by cases in which teachers gave lower marks to Muslim students than their work merited.

Negative Portrayals of Islam

More than discrimination, this group is concerned about negative portrayals of Islam and the circulation of misinformation about the religion. They have the impression that both media and the Orthodox Church (more so the Moldovan Metropolitan because they report more friendly relations with the Bessarabian Metropolitan) perpetuate negative stereotypes. In the case of the Church, they suspect that misinformation filters down from higher levels, rather than being initiated by local priests. Men also reported that media invitations to explain Islam seem to have an opposite effect of perpetuating negative stereotypes, and specifically of encouraging fear that Muslims are terrorists.

Conversion

The Muslims in these focus groups are converts, not immigrants. They converted as a matter of individual initiative; that is, they did not do so for family reasons, such as marrying a Muslim. The members of this particular focus group therefore represent the trend of conversions that the Orthodox groups disparage; it is knowledge of cases like theirs that contributes to the public's general fear of "Islamization" and "fanaticism" described by the Orthodox groups. It is also conversion to minority Christian groups that provokes such concern and fear from the Orthodox. Indeed, from an outside perspective, the highly conservative character of all the religious denominations present in Republic of Moldova raises a sociological question: why is conversion occurring from the more lenient (albeit thoroughly conservative) to the stricter forms of religious observance? Such a trend will surely have an impact on the kinds of conflicts and accommodations that occur regarding religious and other rights.

Value of Religiosity

Relatedly, the Muslim group echoes and amplifies the comments that minority Christians made in their groups (and interviews) concerning the positive aspects of their evaluation as a religious person. Alongside discrimination, Muslims also report experiencing very high levels of respect and trust. Veiled women may be especially likely to be offered seats on transport or public waiting areas, to be

given looks of respect, and to be treated well; such respect is likely to be given by older and "educated" individuals. Muslims may also be entrusted with keys and other forms of access because they will not steal. Among men, abstinence from alcohol is positively valued, and the high degree of service willingly provided to family members by women is seen positively as well. In other words, even as fanaticism is feared, high levels of personal religiosity, expressed through a number of forms (modesty, temperance, service to others, charity, sharing, honesty) are highly valued in general society.

Islam and the State

The group reported that the state generally accommodates Islam. One major point of concern is, not surprisingly, the ability of Muslim women to be veiled in public. To-date, official procedures all accommodate this requirement; even photographs for internal identity documents may be made with a headcovering as long as the full face is visible. One of the group members reported not being allowed to do so, but her fellow discussion members concluded that it was an isolated incident of an employee not knowing the procedures.

They support a relation of consultation between Church and State, such that laws would be harmonized with religion. Islam already envisions what they see as a more complete harmonization of law, commerce, and property relations with spiritual life than what would even be expected of a European (Christian) state in which the Church would only be concerned with laws that affect religion and spiritual life per se. The group members feel that registered Muslim organizations in Moldova are already in working relationships with the State, but suggest that it would not be a bad idea to create a council of registered religious groups that would exist in some consulting relation with the state.

Like all the other groups, the Muslims have a favorable impression of Moldova's laws, but find that they do not work. Nor are the police effective. In cases of discrimination and the violation of rights, they say, it is necessary to make use of special NGOs and organizations that know and support the relevant laws.

V. Young Urban People (18-30)

We gathered a group of young urban people (there was 1 rural participant) to see if their perspectives, when they talked outside the presence of older adults, were different in degree or kind from those of older adults or from those provided by the younger members of the mixed-age focus groups. The answer is that the perspectives of urban youth did not differ in any major ways from those of their elders. In distinction to the other groups, the youth-only group did speak at greater length, and with obvious personal attachment, about rights. For this group, it was clear that "rights", in the abstract, encompass the liberty to become who one wants to be and to live as one wants; and this same liberty is democracy. In general, they talked a lot and in much freer form than did most other groups. When discussing rights in the concrete, conflicts, discrimination, and Church-State relations, the perspectives of the youth provide some additional nuance to the perspectives already described by the mixed-age groups of Orthodox and Christian minorities; the most important of these nuances are presented in list-form below:

- People in Moldova, including the youth in this group, are not clear about what constitutes 'hate speech'; how this differs from 'free speech'; and whether their rights to 'free speech' are compromised by censorship of 'hate speech'.
- The Media and Press in Moldova are not felt to be free. Thus, while the young feel more or less free to express their personal opinions, they feel that no one listens to them; and, if one seeks a public audience, then freedom of expression is not protected.
- Family Law in Moldova is considered to discriminate against men. Specifically in case of divorce, young men complained that the law awards full custody of children to the mother unless she is unfit to care for them. It is their wives they want to divorce, say the men, not their children.
- The youth were unequivocal in their prioritization of a mother's health and life over that of an unborn child in decisions concerning abortion. (Like their elders they did not support abortion as a matter of "choice", but they did not subscribe to the mother accepting her own death in favor of a child's life).

- At the same time, it was from within the youth group that one person suggested making abortion illegal. In all other groups, the law was not contested even though it allows something that is not in accord with religious principles.
 - The young disagree about whether linguistic discrimination still exists in Moldova. Indeed, the youth see no more evidence of discrimination or the maltreatment of individuals than do the mixed-age Orthodox groups. Their lack of reporting discrimination, however, may be because they do not know how to recognize it.
 - They are sensitive to some issues, and know that Roma and Muslims are denied work. This is in contrast to the situation of Christian minorities who find work.
 - Along with the Muslim group, the youth are also the only ones to report (five speakers) on parents who disown their children over matters of religious conversion.
 - The youth report feeling the “imposition” of religious values and perspectives on children from multiple directions; this includes pressures from atheist teachers as well as priests teaching in school, but also pressures outside the school. Some connect the imposition of religion on children with broader trends of religious imposition felt throughout society.
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Church and State in the Republic of Moldova

The main aim of this study was to provide a social analysis of the relation between the Church and the State in the case of the Republic of Moldova. The most relevant and important findings are detailed, for all three research instruments, in the above sections. In this final chapter we aim at blending the results of the three distinct research components in order to produce synthetic conclusions for this sociological study.

Before presenting the conclusions, we must underline certain important aspects concerning the research context. This analysis is aimed to be impartial, thus we have excluded any socio-political elements. Nevertheless, we must admit that there are documented concerns regarding the potential limitations of certain fundamental rights as a consequence of the influence that certain churches and the religious movements hold. One such example is the *International Religious Freedom Report for 2011* of the US Department of State, which draws attention to the violation of the right of free religious practice¹⁸.

Similarly, a series of monitorizations conducted by the Soros Moldova Foundation between 2014-2015 illustrate the persistence of these issues. The 2016 electoral year brought the direct intervention of certain religious leaders in the electoral presidential campaign, as well as a strong focus of the public agenda on religious-inspired topics such as teaching religion in public schools, as well as the marginalization of same-sex couples. All these facts illustrate a growing influence that the Churches have in the political and social spheres, and it therefore makes one ask whether there is public support for social changes in this direction?

¹⁸ US Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2011. Republic of Moldova*, available at: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/193051.pdf>

Rights Recognition and Limitation

The Republic of Moldova has signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and recognizes and guarantees, through its Constitution, fundamental human rights and liberties. However, it is debatable whether the public support for these rights and liberties is high enough to describe the situation as being irreversible. Although the majority of the population accepts and supports the existence of fundamental rights, their understanding is still low. There is no strong support for appealing to an extra-territorial court such as the European Court for Human Rights, moreover there are situations for which the limitation of a fundamental right is socially acceptable. We can trace an attitude of rejection of rights for certain individuals or groups who are perceived as being *different* from the majority. These perceptions are constructed on a society defined by a strong social conservatism and a high degree of intolerance for otherness. Opinion leaders tend to often describe their communities as not being discriminatory towards certain individuals, but the data seems to deny this perception.

Another topic frequently mentioned by the opinion leaders is the relationship between rights and obligations: if there are rights, there must also be obligations. There are strong indications that the public opinion has a similar view on this topic. While we are not certain that there is a critical mass of citizens that would demand/accept the limitation of certain rights for those who do not meet their obligations, the risk is certain.

In this context religious influence is visible from two perspectives. First, there is the strong correlation between one's deep religiosity and high conservatism and intolerance, a relation that is supported by the statistical data gathered in this research. Secondly, the most debated rights are those that are considered immoral by the dogma of the major Christian Church in Moldova. The most relevant example is the case of sexual minorities' rights. When it comes to Human Rights, there is no "alternative" discourse as in the case of the Russian Orthodox Church, nor does it seem necessary to the churches to develop such a discourse: the opinion of the majority of the population is already in accord with that of the churches.

Religious Freedom

Another fact pointed out by the quantitative data is that there are situations in which religious liberty is limited both by public institutions, as well as by the society as a whole. These cases are completed by the information gathered through interviews and focus groups. There are several denominations that are strongly marginalized (e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses), denominations towards which suspicion (of endangering others, physically or morally) is very high (e.g. Muslims, given the recent international context), as well as various Christian confessional communities that are being *tolerated*, but which are still prevented from freely practicing their religion.

Qualitative data illustrates that multi-confessional communities have, in some cases, developed ad-hoc solutions for peaceful cohabitation, and in some cases collaboration, between the major Orthodox Christian denomination and the minority ones. We consider these solutions ad-hoc rather than systemic, as respondents have mentioned that they are usually not transposed at the district national level. Also, conflict situations still exist, even if they don't reach the mass media.

In the cases where cooperation was reached, the key was finding a common ground between confessional communities. This explains why most cooperation situations were registered in the communities where there are more than one Christian Church. A negative side-effect of this situation is that in certain cases common ground is based on intolerance towards those perceived as not being *normal*: non-Christians, sexual minorities, or even Christian denominations perceived as being too different.

The above-mentioned relationship between rights and obligations is also strongly used as a moral justification for one's intolerance. In short, certain people "lose" their rights because they don't fulfill their obligations toward the state and society. This type of discourse provides a strong intolerance boost in every society.

Church versus State

The Church (or Churches, generally) is perceived as a source of morality and order in a society in which the institution of the State is not able to fulfill these roles. This perception is supported both by quantitative survey data, as well as by qualitative data from interviews. Social conservatism and frequent church interactions are correlated with support for order and authoritarian government. During interviews, numerous opinion leaders have complained about the lack of morality in society.

A certain degree of influence that churches might hold on public affairs is acceptable both for numerous opinion leaders, as well as for the majority of population. In this context the Church can be seen as a legitimized source of authority, as opposed to the State. But it is important to note that this is due to the perceived weakness of the State, rather than the strong Church. Religious leaders are not very popular; as a matter of fact their trust level is similar to that of politicians. Thus, this recourse to the Church as a strong moral source is not based on the current situation; rather it is a projection of an ideal Church.

Church and State

Generally, public opinion points toward a strong preference for collaboration between the major Church and the State. **Separation between the Church and State is accepted at the level of discourse, but data shows that it is not an internalized practice; rather it is considered the appropriate answer.** In fact, it is clear that the Orthodox Church expects the State to provide a privileged treatment translated into two major approaches: direct (material) support and religious influence on public policy. The motives behind these expectations are on the one hand, the need to be validated as one of the most important social institutions; on the other hand, it is the need to repair the moral and material damages that the Church suffered during the Soviet era.

This approach, especially Church influence on public policy, is strongly supported by society. Almost half of the citizens would approve direct public funding of the major religious denominations. Slightly less than a third would also support certain forms of tax relief for the Church. This opinion is predominant among the local community leaders. Representatives of the Orthodox Church indicate that local public administrations would support the church more if there were no legal boundaries. This was confirmed during the discussions with representatives of public administration who described how they provide support to the Church through various “legal” means (including the discretionary funds of local councils). There are certain indications that, at least at the local level, the practice of funding the Church is tacitly accepted both by officials and population. In this context, a potential law amendment that would legalize the practice would be met favorably.

The influence that Church bears on the State is even more visible when following topics are discussed: teaching religion in public schools, reproductive health (abortion), acknowledging rights for sexual minorities or equal gender roles. Except for the last issue, the data reveals a strong public support for the conservative-religious agenda. In this context we must add that when religious conversion happens, it usually occurs from the more lenient (Orthodox) to the stricter forms of religious observance (different neo-Protestant confessions or Islam).

Furthermore, data gathered through all the used instruments shows that there is a dominant opinion favoring a Church (particularly the Orthodox Church) that would be regularly consulted in the law-making process, at least in the case of “moral” laws. This situation is based on the moral-source-attributed-role of the Church.

Against this background there is a real risk that the public would support the state’s adoption of religious-conservative public policies, at the local or central level, that would seriously limit the rights for certain minority social groups.

Church and Politics

Public support for collaboration between the Church and the State seems to be capped at direct participation of religious denominations in political life. But even in this case, the situation is relative. On the one hand, the majority rejects direct involvement, such as priests who stand for election. On the other hand, around one-third would accept the selection of political candidates based on religious criteria, or recommendations from religious leaders on how to vote. The core of citizens who would embrace a radical religious-conservative agenda is around 10% of the population; nonetheless, these are the citizens with reduced access to resources.



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